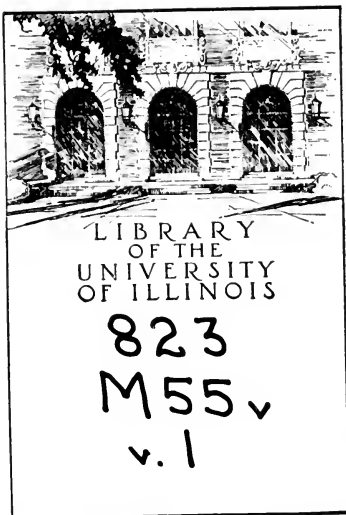


VIOLET MOSES

By
Leonard Merrick



To

Dr. W. Drath Strange

with the author's friendship

Aug. 91.

VIOLET MOSES.

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BY

LEONARD MERRICK

AUTHOR OF "MR. BAZALGETTE'S AGENT"



IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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VIOLET MOSES.

CHAPTER I.

THE occupant of the room was a young man. He had once been a very fortunate young man, but he was not fortunate now, as his clothes denoted. The suit he wore had left Bond Street four years since, before the crash came which had heralded his majority, and to-day the mother who had paid for it subsisted on infinitesimal dividends in a London boarding-house, and the shabby young man was fighting the world alone.

Tee-fair. Johnson, 12 Dec. 1951

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Geo. Rev. Ray

Of the numerous methods of combating a coward who truckles to a few and bullies the remainder, the way Allan Morris had chosen was his pen. He was the "A. M." whose initials appeared in a third-rate society paper beneath the tales which brought their author in a guinea each, and at his elbow a pile of MS. proclaimed that he was further engaged upon a novel.

The pages on which the ink was still wet, however, pertained neither to the periodical nor the book: they constituted a letter. It was an exceptionally long letter, designed for the lady in London, and it was chiefly remarkable for the recurrence of one name: "Miss Dyas." The pith of it all was that the Fates had smiled when two strangers from Chester, staying a fortnight in the Earl's Court boarding-house, had instanced their town as a place adapted to

his requirements. He had said the country was much cheaper than the metropolis, and declared how welcome Mrs. Carroll and her niece made him when he called. That was the pith of it; but four sheets were filled by a description of the niece, and five in asserting how thankful he was that he had met her.

“My friend is discovered!” he had written. “The friendship I have always pictured with a woman who should understand me, and point out my faults, and yet see more virtues than failings, all is now an accomplished fact. She writes as well—you know my ideal friend was always to write—and though her productions have not, up to the present, attained the dignity of print, they are brimful of imagery and talent, and when she has had more experience will make her famous. This brings me to the point

where she differs from my fancy sketch : she is so much younger than I expected my *confidante* to be. Indeed, in age I admit she is only a girl, and the female mentor of my hopes was to be my senior. On the other hand, though she may have seemed no more than her actual seventeen-and-a-half years to you during a couple of weeks, the individuality of this child-woman upon deeper acquaintance is astonishing. She is like no one I have ever known, like no character I could have conceived," et cetera. There followed an allusion to his accompanying Mrs. Carroll and Miss Dyas to the Cathedral on Sundays ; annoyance was expressed at having been unable to suggest taking them on the river while the summer lasted, because " I am such an awful duffer with the sculls," and at the end, dashed in under the signature, as by one who has

omitted to mention an all-important fact, came the statement: "I am going round to them to tea as soon as I have posted this!"

Mr. Morris directed the envelope and then leant back in his chair, wondering vaguely how much of what he had scribbled he would have uttered by word of mouth. There arose the unpleasant doubt that has come to most of us after inditing an epistle in which we have been more than usually explicit about ourselves, our opinions, and our weaknesses—the doubt whether it would be quite understood at its destination when read. The majority of mankind are apt to display their idiosyncrasies in parlance with their fellows, but there are others of whose natures their letters are the truer indication, and whose speech reveals little of their inner minds. Allan Morris was one of these;

confidences instead of springing to his lips had a tendency to flow from his pen's point, and often, where the fear of ridicule would have kept him silent on a topic in conversation, he would expound theory after theory, to be recalled with an agony of misgiving, on a sheet of note-paper.

He had been writing with his back to the stove, at an end of the table that extended along the middle of the room. Facing him, at the opposite extremity, stood a cheap sideboard, on which were ranged a quantity of shell boxes, some decanters, the cruet-stand, and a number of mugs of the "Present from Margate" type. The apartment was on the first floor, and to his right two windows, each adorned with a red and a white curtain suspended from a piece of tape, looked out into a narrow street. A couch occupied the remaining wall, and at

its foot was the door. The upholstery was red also, and of the dilapidated reps which landladies especially affect, while the mantelshelf, destitute of a mirror, and void save for a collection of memorial cards and a pair of those variegated vases in which the lower classes find their compensation for paying an ordinary price for inferior tea, contributed its quota of melancholy to the whole.

Presently he rose, and arranging the litter in readiness for his return, prepared to depart. He was, as a rule, a trifle afraid of presenting himself too punctually at his hostess's, deeming such precision might be construed into the desire to be asked for an earlier hour next time; but to this invitation Mrs. Carroll had added, as an after-thought, "Do not be late," and he had been thankfully recalling the postscript all the day.

Powis Lodge was at no great distance

from the General Post Office, and when he had despatched his letter a feeling of exhilaration set in which steadily increased until the house was gained. The blinds were not yet lowered, and in crossing the road he could see the reflection of the fire shining pleasantly behind the glass as if to forecast the welcome that awaited him. Lonely as the boy was; deprived of a home, as he had *naïvely* acknowledged to his mother, ever since he had reached an age to appreciate one, sensitively anxious, moreover, to be liked—in common with most persons, who, owing to some defect of temperament, form few intimacies—his heart always beat a shade more quickly when he mounted the three tessellated steps of the villa wherein he knew his presence was no longer regarded as the mere “calling” of a visitor; and it was with a sensation of real joy he was

given to remember how fully the old hope had been realized at last, making him—most delicious thought—someone's "best friend." He could hear Dandy barking defiance to his summons, and imagined Miss Dyas quieting him with a playful reprimand. She was saying, "Naughty dog, that's Mr. Morris!" he thought, and smiled happily where he waited, to the entertainment of the grocer's lad, who grinned response. A moment later he was in the house.

"Find yourself a chair, and come and tell us the news," said Mrs. Carroll, as soon as greetings had been exchanged. "How is the book?"

"And how is the author?" said Miss Dyas.

She was sitting on a low stool before the fender, a favourite habit of hers in the gloaming, and it is descriptive of the girl

to say she could do these things without appearing *poseuse*, although the fact that she was slightly below the medium height may have accounted for the ability in some degree.

“The book is quite well, thank you,” he answered gaily; “and the author is rather satisfied with himself this afternoon.”

He was thinking what a study she made just then, with her lustrous eyes upraised, and the delicate oval face flushed faintly by the heat. She had soft curling hair, too, which fell loose about her neck and shoulders and over the deep lace collar, and the play of the flames brought out the gold that lurked amongst the brown very prettily.

“Have you been working hard?” she pursued; “and what are the events of the day? Confess!”

“Imprimis, I got up” . . .

“What time?” she interrupted, with mock authority.

“Nine o’clock.”

“*I* was having breakfast by then! All right—go on.”

“And when I went into the next room I found Mrs. Carroll’s note on the coffee-pot.”

“To which you said, ‘Oh, bother those people! I wish they would let me alone.’”

“Don’t you mind her, Mr. Morris,” interposed the widow; “she is fearfully ill bred.”

“I wrote steadily till one, and then I took my usual walk till two. I was in Eastgate Street and the Rows generally, but I could not see you” . . .

“We were not out: I was painting.”

“And then I went back to dinner.

After dinner I finished my story for the 'Society Echo,' revised the eighteenth chapter of my novel, wrote to my mother, and I believe that's all. Have I been good?"

"Pretty well," she assented, pursing her lips; "I think you are entitled to be idle now. But didn't you say 'Bother those people'? I want to know—didn't you?"

"I decline to reply to such a question. Mrs. Carroll, am I justified in declining to reply?"

"Perfectly justified, Mr. Morris. Don't encourage her, or she will become absolutely unbearable. As it is, I am not allowed to have the lamp brought in, you perceive, but have to sit in the dark to humour her."

"I see my 'pictures,'" rejoined Miss

Dyas, gazing earnestly into the glowing coals; "you wouldn't bring in the lamp and send away my pictures: the angels, and the demons, and all the human beings there behind the bars? Such comedies and tragedies as go on in that Abbotsford stove if you would only learn to look for them, you people; you don't know what you miss! This half light is the time I enjoy the most: some of my tales are born in it. Oh! I forgot: I shall not give you any information—I am offended. I'm not worth being answered, I suppose!"

"Mrs. Carroll, make my peace with her," he beseeched.

"Violet, you are not to tease."

"No; I am offended," she insisted. "Some gentlemen—I mention no names—but some gentlemen can be very rude!"

“What do you want me to do?” he queried. “You should have seen that letter I sent to my mother!”

“Did you say what a nuisance we were?” she responded.

“I said how kind you both were, how glad I was when you asked me to come here; and I told her I had a friend, a real, true friend, just like the one I had always wanted to meet!”

“Ah,” she turned to him frankly, with a quick, pleased smile, and when she smiled her child-like beauty was bewitching, “forgive my shamming! I wasn’t really cross. You knew that, didn’t you? Violet’s ashamed!”

These two words had been from her babyhood her usual form of apology for any omission or misdemeanour, and when she felt at all deeply she maintained the

fashion of speaking of herself in the third person still. It was another illustration of the faculty she had for doing naturally what in ninety-nine girls out of a hundred would have seemed infantine and affected. Now she laughed outright as she caught her aunt's expression of amusement, for 'Violet's ashamed' had long since passed into a stock quotation.

"Tell us where you have left your heroine," she continued. "Is she contented or miserable, and—awful thought—are you describing her dresses? Oh, auntie, won't he make a fiasco of the dresses!"

"I shan't," he retorted, sapiently; "she has only worn one up to now."

"Poor creature," murmured Mrs. Carroll, "at the end of the eighteenth chapter! Is she in the workhouse?"

“I mean I have only expatiated upon one. As a rule, I allude to the ‘charm, yet simplicity, of her costume’; it sounds well, and prevents any danger of brain fever. I was quite safe in the solitary instance where I did venture into details, for her frock was copied from Miss Dyas’s!”

“Mine! What, this — serge?” she exclaimed.

“No; the pink one you used to wear when I first came down here — ‘*Nun’s Veiling!*’” he added, triumphantly.

“The ‘nun’s veiling’ was ‘zephyr’ — but that’s a detail! Don’t stop, this is too lovely! How was it made?”

“It was made,” he proceeded, with the calm assurance of a man who is aware he is not committing himself, “in a style admirably adapted to the youthful form.”

“Thank you; ‘admirably adapted to the youthful form,’ is good and vague.”

“She also wore a collar”—he was not so sure of his ground here, and could not recollect how the difficulty had been surmounted in the manuscript sufficiently well to fall back upon an extract—“a filmy collar, that came a long way down, and went all the way round, so that it joined behind, the same as the one you have on.”

“Aunt Bertha, he is ‘booing’ at my collar.”

“What is ‘booing?’” he demanded.

“Present participle of the verb ‘to boo,’ otherwise ‘to ridicule,’” she averred with dignity.

“Of Miss Dyas’s own and particular vocabulary, Mr. Morris. It is scarcely slang, since I believe it is her own invention; but it’s none the less objectionable

on that account. Now, you have passed your examination very nicely, and we'll have tea."

"And your heroine looked a sight," said the girl, conclusively. "No, she didn't; I'm a little horror. Bring the page to auntie, and she will tell you if it's all right. Friends?"

"Friends!" he declared, taking the hand she extended.

Then twilight was banished, and, as was always the case after these pretended misunderstandings, she was more than ever gentle and sympathetic to make amends. They dined early at the villa, and presently she was attacking muffins and cake in a manner that betokened a thoroughly healthy appetite and a complete unacquaintance with that young ladies' accomplishment known as "trifling with food." In fact, Violet

Dyas was accustomed to do everything as she wanted to do it; it was fortunate her impulses were so often graceful. In his lodgings the boy frequently thought of the two as they were now: the niece with the urn before her, her hanging hair half screening her cheek on either side, and the debated collar falling softly from her throat upon the full dark bodice; while the widow, never too strong, reclined in her arm-chair, biting her toast slowly and listening to her companion's eager chatter. He had no poetical fads about the sex; he did not feel with Byron that it was "a real pain to him to see women eat," nor regard his friend's laugh with Lamartine as "a defect of youth ignorant of destiny"; and at the moment he was occupied in trying to fix the cheery scene indelibly on his memory, that he might reproduce it with

greater vividness when he was lonely again.

“A penny!”

“Not for sale,” he returned; “besides, you never pay.”

The jesting reference to his abstraction roused him, nevertheless, and then it struck him what a vapidty it was to have dispelled the sudden cloud that had begun to shadow his happiness at the remembrance of the solitude to which he must go back. “A penny,” why, where the coin would have been impotent the offer had been efficacious. She must have grown a very dear friend, indeed, he decided, when the mere sound of her voice was as magical as this. And next came a little rush of mental congratulation at his own capacity for rapid induction; he argued well, he was delighted to observe, recognizing both cause and effect as an author

should. He was encouraged. Again, how lovely she was, and he was not good looking—on that point he was not given to flatter himself. Was it not a proof that he must be clever—more, that his cleverness could be discerned even in the trivial amenities of social intercourse, that she with her attractions of mind and feature should have been drawn towards him? The “superior” sex are every whit as conceited as the “weaker,” and they hide their vanity with less adroitness; the chief difference lies in the circumstance that an unprepossessing girl is apt to deceive herself about her appearance, and a plain man will concede he is not handsome, but sustains himself by a compensatory belief in his “way.” Men, too, are always ready to attribute an abundance of brain power to the women who countenance their egotism; it is a compliment by

implication to themselves, and where the *confidantes* are fools the discovery is generally made late, and with much reluctance. It is to be noticed an undergraduate will speak of "the intellect" of the young person he is competent to fascinate at the "Cherry Tree Arms."

In this case, however, neither of the pair was a fool, and the sympathy that had sprung up between them was founded on the most solid of bases—kindred tastes; it might, therefore, be deemed permanent. There had been thrown together a boy verging upon manhood, talented and ambitious, and a girl whose nature was that rare blending of the imaginative and the practical, which means in a woman the possibility of inordinate influence over the most opposite of temperaments. Her sway over one was manifestly established now,

and already she was stronger than he, more immutable of purpose, more self-reliant. Only the "inductive ratiocination" on which the novelist was priding himself had not brought him so far as this as yet, and meanwhile the muffins were getting cold.

By-and-by, leaning across the piano at which she had been singing, he owned to her what his thoughts had been. It was typical of the place each had in the other's life that she made reservations, and he told her all.

"I don't know that you were wrong," she answered, reflectively. "I *have* given you my friendship, and the word means so much! People have said to me, 'Miss Dyas, will you let me be your friend?' and I have offended them by not replying 'Yes.' But I couldn't; how can one truthfully say

‘yes’ if there is any need for the question to be asked ? ”

“ And there is no need for me to ask, is there ? ”

“ None ! ” she responded, brightly. “ Ah, don’t you know it ? There is something . . . it has come . . . perhaps it was your stories first, but we were almost friends from the beginning, weren’t we ? ”

“ At the beginning you disliked me : didn’t you tell me you were sorry your aunt suggested Chester that evening ? ”

“ Oh, then ! I meant when you came here, not in London. Yes, that evening I’m afraid I didn’t like you much. Auntie, wasn’t he stuck-up that evening in London when he was introduced ? ”

“ I remember you objected to the way he did his hair, my dear,” rejoined Mrs. Carroll gently from the fireside ; “ as well as I

could make out, it seemed to be your only ground for complaint."

"It was the barber," he asseverated, struggling desperately not to blush; "he had cut it so short I looked like a convict. It was not fair to make me accountable for a blunder of the barber."

"You were stuck-up," Miss Dyas reiterated. "It was your air, not your hair I found fault with. Can you manage this accompaniment?"

He read music very fairly at sight, avoiding the usual mistake of the amateur insomuch as he followed the singer and did not attempt to lead her. The girlish contralto, too, was sufficiently developed to be agreeable, so they continued trying over ballad after ballad from the pile upon the rack pleurably enough. And then Mrs. Carroll played Chopin's "*Marche Funèbre*,"

played it in a fashion that few non-professionals could—never slurring the rhythm or undervaluing the time, and as the great solemn chords swelled and sank, Mr. Morris saw the girl's face turn white and her eyes glow. It is a curious term to apply to the human eye, but it is precisely what they did; tears very, very seldom came to her, and, instead, the light of the pupils seemed to deepen into a sombre red till they glowed like sullen fire.

“Is it not grand?” she murmured when it was over. “It takes me up to heaven, that march.”

“You know that not two people interpret it alike,” said Mrs. Carroll. “Everybody renders it with more or less different intention.”

“The ‘Prayer Movement’ is what I love best,” from Miss Dyas; “the ‘Service.’

Cannot you hear the minister speaking, and fancy the hush of the weeping bystanders? When that melody comes in I can see the sunshine bursting through the clouds and stealing across his pitying face."

"Little Vi!" whispered the widow, with a caress to the pet name.

"I can, auntie, just as clearly as if it were all taking place before me. Sometimes it is a mother who is dead . . . a mother buried young, the same as mine . . . and then I am in the group in a black frock, crying. And sometimes it is 'Little Vi' herself who is lying under the flowers in the coffin . . . and when I'm gone you are very miserable, and I imagine you coming back . . . and sitting here alone, thinking of me."

"My child, you mustn't talk so!" said Mrs. Carroll. The mention of "the mother

buried young, the same as mine," brought a throng of memories of the sister who had been so much to her; "it is morbid, you are giving us the horrors!"

"Peccavi, don't be sad, dear! Shall I tell you a story, Mr. Morris?"

"Yes," he answered with ready acquiescence, "tell me a story; what is it about?"

"It's about a little girl," she began slowly, "and she lived with her parents in a big house in London. . . . But this little girl's father was a great deal abroad, such a great deal, that when he came home he was like a stranger to her, . . . so, you see, she didn't quite live with her parents, although I said she did: she only really knew and loved her mother."

She paused for a second in her narrative, her gaze riveted upon the burning coals as

if she were searching among them for her words; and, watching her where she leant forward upon her improvised seat, he understood she was telling him the story of her own life.

“One day God took her mother away, and Violet’s heart was full of grief. She was just eight years old, and she thought peace would never come to her any more. Her father was going away again soon . . . he had been unfortunate, . . . and he was poor. So it was settled she was to go with her aunt, whose house was in Chester, and who had no children of her own to kiss and care for. This aunt had lost her husband not long before, and she was more wretched then even than Vi, I think . . . weren’t you, dear ?”

“I was very unhappy, indeed, little maiden, and you came to comfort me !”

“That’s how it is,” she went on, her head resting in the widow’s lap, “that Aunt Bertha and I are more to one another than people expect to see us. We have suffered together, and together learnt to find our hope in Him . . . It isn’t much of a history, only I am glad you know it; I wanted to tell you the [other night when you had told us yours!”

“Thank you,” he said softly; “and your father,” he asked, “is he never in England?”

“He came once to Chester about two years afterwards; he had just returned from the Cape. That was when poor grandpapa was alive and staying with us.”

“Some time before my father’s death, Mr. Dyas went to America,” added Mrs. Carroll; “he has been out there ever since. From a letter I had from him last month,

though, it isn't unlikely he will shortly be in London once more."

A brief silence followed the last sentence, during which all three were thoughtful. Then :

"Don't you think there is something mournful in having a father one scarcely knows?" said Violet. "To me it always carries a sting, a reproach for having no affection to give him!"

"I think you are being terribly gloomy, and that you ought to beg our pardons," said Mrs. Carroll. "Mr. Morris, will the great work allow you time to come and see us Thursday afternoon? Mr. Finlason and his son are coming; you haven't met young Mr. Finlason, have you?"

No, Mr. Morris had not met young Mr. Finlason, only the father, and he would be very glad. And conversation hencefor-

ward flowing into more lively channels, it was close upon ten o'clock when, declining to remain any longer, on the grounds of duty, he found himself saying good-night.

Entering his lodging the room looked bare and dismal; a scoopful of slack was smouldering in the grate; the gas had been lowered, pending his arrival, with such an eye to economy that he extinguished it altogether in meaning to turn it up. He swore a little, and, discovering the matches on the supper tray, commenced to write. He wrote rapidly and almost without cessation for perhaps an hour, merely stopping once or twice to avoid tautology, and then, to make use of a colloquialism, he "stuck." He waited awhile, and next lighting a cigarette began to pace the floor impatiently, irritated at his own stupidity. The position of affairs was so simple: his

heroine with much compassion for the distress she was occasioning, had just declared her inability to love a man who had been imploring her to be his wife, and the rejected suitor, carried away by an ungovernable impulse, had begged her once, for the first and last time, to let him kiss her "good-bye." That she could consent was out of the question ; but in what words was she to refuse ?

Presently it occurred to the author that he knew a girl equally gentle, high-minded, tender, in real life, and he strove to stimulate his powers of composition by imagining Miss Dyas in the situation of his heroine, and endeavoured to conceive the answer Miss Dyas would have made. He smoked a good deal more tobacco under the influence of this new conjecture, and considering how vast a field for surmise

the substitution had opened up, it was remarkable how little it advanced him. He wrote "How dare you?" and immediately scored it out; she would be pitying, not passionate. He tried "Ah, not that!" but this was worse, for it looked as if she wished her wooer to suggest an alternative. It was certainly surprising, he told himself, remembering the insight to her character which he possessed, that he could not so much as divine her answer to the petition for a kiss. At length, thoroughly disgusted, he tossed the manuscript aside, resolving to trust to morning to bring a solution, and attempted by the perusal of an old magazine to divert his thoughts before turning in. The question, however, continued to obtrude itself, and he was still wondering what Miss Dyas would have answered when he went to bed.



CHAPTER II.

THERE are some women who go through life with such straightforward simplicity of thought and purpose that the philosophy of the world touches them not at all, and they are nearly as innocent at maturity as they were when, as children, they were taught the earth was a place merely intended for humanity's schoolroom, and the greatest ambition of everybody on it was to be "good." These women, it will be noticed, are generally beautiful: they, moreover, make revered mothers and worthless chaperones, and in the ball-room science

of regulating their daughters' programmes with a nice appreciation of pounds, shillings, and pence, they are beneath contempt. They were at no time too numerous, and at the fag-end of the nineteenth century they are few indeed, but there are still some left, thank God; though in view of the cynical indecency, which is the distinguishing feature of the age, it is not improbable they will soon be extinct—like the art of staining glass, the English summer, and many other excellent and delightful things.

Had Mrs. Carroll been a woman of narrower sympathies and wider experience, had she, in fact, been one of the matrons who say, "Y-e-s, a very gentlemanly young fellow, . . . what is his position?" before they blandly murmur, "We shall be pleased to see you," it is quite certain Mr.

Morris's day-dream of a great and reciprocated friendship would never have attained fruition in Chester. She was, however, a very affectionate, simple-minded soul, and if it pleased her niece and this boy—who was staying in their quaint old town while he wrote a novel—to swear eternal friendship under her smiling eyes in the drawing-room of Powis Lodge, why, she was the very last person going to object to it. She was rather glad of the distraction it afforded Violet, truth to tell. She herself was not the most suitable companion for a girl still in her teens, she remembered, sometimes, with a pang of dismay, as she glanced in the mirror at the streaks of grey marring the smooth fair hair "*he*" had been used to praise so—the best of women are not above their harmless human vanities—and they lived so quietly

and saw so few people, save the little old lawyer, Mr. Finlason, and his son, that really the child could scarcely be said to have any intimate acquaintance of her own age.

The Finlasons had already arrived when Mr. Morris was announced on Thursday, and, as he came forward, he was instantly conscious the evening was going to be less agreeable to him than usual. Strangers were a mistake, he felt, in a circle as small as this, forgetting that if there were any stranger here it was he, and he tried to discern whether his friend held a similar opinion, and hoped she would utter it when they were gone.

Mr. Finlason, junior, was a very lanky young man, who spoke a great deal, chiefly of his own pursuits, and that in a silly fashion certainly; but he was, nevertheless,

perpetually speaking, and, as his father and Mrs. Carroll were conversing together, the onus of being interested fell on Violet, and Mr. Morris gradually drifted into the unenviable position known as "odd man out."

These situations to a keen-sighted onlooker are full of amusement; they abound with opportunities to make mental jokes, anent which the only regret to the joker is the impracticability of uttering them, and there is occasionally a transparent device, a deadly resolution on the part of the "odd man" to get the lead and play trumps, which makes him as comic as Coquelin in "*Les Surprises du Divorce*." The fun, notwithstanding, resembles that typified to our youthful comprehensions through the eloquence of a fabled frog, insomuch as it is all on one side, and,

whatever humour there might be about the present arrangement, it was quite imperceptible to Mr. Morris. Indeed, this onus of being interested had been accepted by the girl so admirably—women being always more patient than men—that while she was inwardly exclaiming, “Oh, duty, duty,” and imagining that Allan was sympathizing with her, he had in truth begun to decide she was perfectly content, and to blame her for the very virtue she expected he would applaud.

As a rule, he was happy to see Mr. Finlason there; the little solicitor chatted to the widow, and, on that account, Violet and he were the more free to exchange confidences; but, until now, Mr. Finlason had come alone, not accompanied by a long-legged son, with a strident laugh and a faculty for monopolizing everybody’s—

well, Violet's—attention to the exclusion of an older, or, at any rate, a *better* friend! He thought it would have been more comfortable than this in his lodgings, and wished himself back there—almost!

From time to time Mrs. Carroll turned in their direction with some trivial comment or inquiry, but the trio were sitting close together, and she did not remark that anything was amiss. She did observe Walter Finlason was doing the greatest part of the talking, but concluded that Violet and Mr. Morris were being entertained by his experiences.

“Yes,” he was saying, by way of entertaining them, “I’ve only been back a few days; been in London for the governor, and had a run over to Paris for myself, jolly! You’ve never been in Paris, have you, Miss Violet?”

“No, I have never been on the Continent in my life.”

“Ah, you ought to go; put your foot down—not that it would take up much room, by Jove—and make Mrs. Carroll agree! I tell you Paris is very ‘firm,’ when you know it. That’s where fellows make the mistake: they go to the opera, and the Eden, perhaps, and then they come back and fancy they know their Paris!”

It had been his first visit to the French capital, and he had been there precisely three weeks, but he had read something like this lately in a novel.

“Have *you* been in Paris, Mr. Morris?” said Miss Dyas.

“No,” he answered, “I haven’t!” He was annoyed at her asking him; he would have liked to answer “yes,” and be able to lure Mr. Finlason into pitfalls and destruc-

tion. If it had been Brussels, now, he knew every corner of it!

“Been in Chester long, Mr. Morris? Not a bad little town while it’s fresh to you, is it? Strangers are generally ‘mashed’ on Chester, but it’s too dull for this boy, thank you! I clear out of it as often as I can, and leave the governor to mind the ‘shop!’”

“I think it is one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen,” Allan responded quietly; “one gets rather tired of the bustle of big cities when one is used to them.”

“Mr. Morris is a novelist,” explained the girl; “what you think dull he finds refreshing.”

“Oh, write novels, do you? Wonder if I’ve read any of them! Not that I do read much, you know; you aren’t to be offended if I haven’t, ha, ha. Novels are mostly

patronized by the ladies, aren't they? I go in for cycling, myself. But I picked up one the other day, awful rot, the book I mean, not the machine—you do chaff, Miss Violet—a lot of sentimental bosh that made me sick! What are the titles of yours? There's nothing like a scorching title, is there?"

"Miss Dyas is mistaken," said Allan. "I am a journalist, not an author. My articles and stories appear in papers."

"Do any writing for the 'Pink 'Un'?"

"I do not; the staff of the 'Pink 'Un', I believe, is complete."

He leant back in his corner of the sofa, and became engrossed in the contemplation of the fire, as if he had suddenly developed Violet's ability for seeing pictures there, and Finlason continued to address himself to her.

Well, Allan was displeased, she saw that now, but it could not be helped. She had done her best, she reflected, to bring him into the conversation, and to make him shine in it. It was not her fault that he had never been in Paris, and was too young to have written for the "Pink 'Un!" She supposed the "Pink 'Un" was some high-class magazine of the "Nineteenth Century" type, to contribute to which was reserved for authors who were already famous, like Mallock or Marion Crawford. Still he was being very unkind, and she listened and put in her mechanical rejoinders with a growing pain in her heart which was new to her. If she had been older she would have construed the ungraciousness of his mood into a sign of her power, and been flattered; as it was, she merely saw the injustice of it, and was hurt.

He was making her obvious duty hard for her instead of lending her assistance—he, her friend, that was the bitter thought! It would have been such an easy thing to have been amiable and polite to her aunt's guest, and looked forward to a cosy afternoon another day if Mr. Morris had only smiled and understood as he should have done—as she would have done if their positions had been reversed. On how many occasions had she not cheered him when he was discouraged and needed strength—it was the mutual obligation of friendship, surely? He himself had often said it, and thanked her for her goodness so earnestly in a hurried undertone she solely heard, or just when their hands met sometimes as he went away, that she had been sorrier for his loneliness than before, and more than ever grateful they had met. And now, for the very first time,

she had wanted help from him, and he had failed her—oh, it was cruel!

And so, being able to act a great deal better than he, because she belonged to the sex who are at once stronger to endure and more patient to bear, more potent to soothe and more difficult to comprehend than the deftest, brawniest, wiseacre of a man God made since Adam, she laughed bravely at young Finlason's anecdotes; and Allan Morris, on the sofa, employed himself by manufacturing sarcasms to be launched as innocently as might be if either of them gave him the chance.

The recreation proved waste of intellect. Violet, sore at the coolness rather of manner than actual words with which her attempts had been received, ceased to refer to him, and Finlason was regarding him as a well-meaning fellow without much to say for

himself, whom his hostess must probably find rather a bore. He therefore remained gloomily silent till they all rose to go to the table, when his fancy sadly darted to their customary teas, minus the two extra cups and saucers, the additional confectionery, and the unfamiliar element.

“Where am I to go, Miss Violet,” demanded Walter Finlason, as they joined the others, “which is my seat?”

“What chair am *I* to take, Miss Dyas?”

Allan had never called her anything but “Miss Dyas” in the whole course of their intimacy; but all the same, following the other appellation as it did, he could not avoid placing the slightest stress upon it now, and ridiculously hoped she would be a trifle wounded by the difference.

The droll and the serious were intermingled very closely in the pleasant draw-

ing-room of a country villa that evening, and, as is frequently the case, only two out of the five personages in it had the faintest perception of what was going on. Pain had entered into the friendship that hitherto had flowed so placidly between the pair, and the new emotion had been begotten by the introduction of an empty-headed young gentleman with an objectionable style and loud checked trowsers. It is really often interesting to note the remarkable effects a fool is able to produce.

Later on: "Well, Mr. Morris, how is the work progressing?" said the solicitor, cheerily. "Come and tell me all about it!"

Mr. Morris was delighted; he would ensconce himself by Mrs. Carroll and the old man until it was sufficiently late to make his adieux, and, what was more, he would be extremely loquacious, to let Violet

see she was perfectly at liberty to devote herself to whomsoever she pleased, and to manifest how complacently he could accommodate himself to her choice. There would then be two groups, if she and the idiot could be said to constitute a "group"—for that they were all within arm's length of one another did not affect his theory an atom—and he would have been ill-treated.

There is in human nature a certain contradiction, which may be described as an exultance of grief. It consists in knowing oneself a "victim."

"Mr. Morris is going to astonish us all one day," said Mrs. Carroll. "We shall be quite proud to have met him before he was celebrated, and always be reminding him of it!"

"That's very likely," rejoined the lawyer. "When you're 'somebody,' Mr. Morris,

you will be amazed to discover what a number of persons there were who always went about prophesying your success! Still in Lady's Lane?"

"Yes, I'm still there, Mr. Finlason. I don't know that I could do any better. Apartments are all much of a muchness, are they not? The chief variety is to be found in the landladies."

"Ah, landladies! The one who is tearful when you mention that you thought a leg of mutton would have served you for three dinners, eh! and the other one who bullies you; they might be classed with servants as necessary evils! And yet I remember one—I was living in Camberwell, I recollect, and my employers had promised to raise my salary twenty pounds a-year if I mastered shorthand, and smashed as soon as I'd learnt it—who refused to send up her bill when

I lost my billet, and offered to lend me a couple of sovereigns until I got something else. She was a little Welshwoman, and her name was all double l's. I wonder if she's alive now, and still letting lodgings to impecunious clerks mastering 'Pitman's System.' Well, well, God bless her, anyhow!"

"And what did you give her when you obtained another situation?" asked Mrs. Carroll, laughing.

"Give her! madam? I gave her 'notice'; my next berth was for fifteen shillings a week, and it would not run even to a 'two-pair-back' in Camberwell. So is virtue rewarded!"

"Who was the 'virtue,' sir," said Allan, "you or the lady whose name was all double l's?"

"Both, my young friend, judging by

results; it has become such a general axiom that virtue plays second fiddle in life, that when an old man has failed to fulfil all his juvenile aspirations, he can always say, 'behold, I am virtuous!'"

"I've often thought," Allan pursued, "I should like to write a thing—or has it been done—called 'The Book of Landladies: their Portraits and Peculiarities;' and if you have stayed in lodgings often, Mr. Finlason, haven't you sometimes been filled with a wild desire to purchase (discriminatingly) their works of art? What a maddening collection could be made: 'The Black Brunswicker's Departure,' and 'The Black Brunswicker's Return;' the adipose baby (in oils) with water on the brain reclining on phenomenal grass, and cuddling a dog, in the execution of which the artist was evidently

undecided whether he should make it real or Berlin wool; 'England, Farewell,' with the spectre mother and triangular infant, all sash and pantaloons, watching the receding vessel; and then the companion, 'Welcome Arrival,'—the spectre mother, much improved in appearance during her husband's absence, scanning the horizon through a pepper-castor, and the triangular infant archly holding up one finger, and looking the wrong way!"

"Buy them up, and send them to your worst enemy!" Mrs. Carroll suggested.

"Should I have to beware of an action, Mr. Finlason?"

"I think it would be a capital offence!" said the lawyer.

"A capital revenge, at any rate," rejoined Allan; "if I had an enemy I would consider it. But, really, landladies with their

ornaments and peculiarities are very funny, only one can never appreciate them till they are over. Sala's reminiscence is good; do you know it? The landlady gave him notice to quit because he objected to having in three pounds of bacon at the time, and didn't like it 'streaky.' She said she had let lodgings for five-and-twenty years, and wanted to know if he called himself a gentleman! At least those are the words he tells the story in somewhere."

They both laughed, and the young man blessed Mr. Sala for having made the joke. Violet gave him one long reproachful look, and slowly moved, so that her face was hidden from his view. She regretted she had shown he was wounding her at all, but her heart was big within her just then, and she had done it almost unwittingly.

Thus this comedy went on, played to an

unappreciative audience, for an hour or more when Mr. Finlason declared that he must go. Everybody got up, and it was while the men were struggling into their overcoats, and somebody was being facetious about somebody else having taken the wrong hat, that the boy and girl drifted together for a moment, and stood side by side in a little strained unhappy silence. Each one waited for the other to speak, and felt desperately that the opportunity was flying by.

“I’m afraid I have been in the way?” he said at length, abruptly.

“How ungenerous you are,” said she under her breath, “how ungenerous!”

They looked into each other’s eyes: she was very white, and he was longing to say how miserable she had made him.

“Are you ready, Morris,” cried the lawyer; “you go our way, don’t you?”

The chance was past. "Yes, I'm ready, Mr. Finlason, I'm coming now!" he said. "Good night, Miss Dyas!"

"Good night," she answered coldly; "auntie, Mr. Morris is waiting to say 'good night' to you!"

They passed out into the moonlight, he and the two other guests, and the world seemed over to him. When they reached Mr. Finlason's house, the widower asked him if he would come in and smoke a cigar, but he declined with some muttered explanation about a forgotten letter with which he must go to the railway station, and cursed himself for not having made the excuse of "work" directly the son offered to stroll there too. He wanted to be alone; he wanted to think. He had not lived long enough to be master of the accomplishment that Talleyrand denominates

le grand art de plaire, and which may be translated as the ability to disguise one's antipathies, and the voice of the companion whom he was accusing of having wrought this breach was detestable to him. Her fingers had scarcely touched his hand in their farewell, and what had he done? Nothing! She had assigned him a position, and then was aggrieved when he accepted it. That was her youth; he might have known so young a girl would fail to prove as sensible as a woman always! At the earliest test of her *savoir faire* the inexperience had been apparent! He wished Mr. Finlason, junior, had stopped in London or in Paris, or gone to the bottom of the Channel before he returned to Chester to bring him disillusion, and to add insult to injury now by wearying him with inanities about the weather!

“Yes, it was a very fine night, indeed,” he replied, “rather chilly for September, but very fine, indeed!”

Perhaps she was sorry, though, he continued, mentally, and had begun to see how wrong she had been. Perhaps . . .

“Pretty girl, Miss Dyas, isn’t she? jolly hair and eyes! Have you got a cigarette, I’ve left my case at home?”

“I’ve the materials if you like to roll one,” he said; “you’ll find the papers in the pouch!”

“Thanks; what do you do with yourself here, been on the river much?”

“I’m busy, you know. I came down to be quiet, so I haven’t been about to any great extent; I go to Mrs. Carroll’s sometimes, and that’s all!”

“Good sort, Mrs. Carroll; used to be a dev’lish pretty woman too. *I* can re-

member her when she was worth turning round to look after. She's fallen off soon, that woman has!"

"I suppose you've known them a long time?" remarked Allan, indifferently.

"Years! Remember Violet Dyas when she was a kid; the ancient one—Mrs. Carroll's father—used to be a client of the governor's. How that girl's altered, she seemed to grow up all at once; and, I say, can't she use those eyes of hers, just! By Jove, girls do know a thing or two, don't they? Can't imagine where they pick 'em up!"

"Here we are," interrupted Allan with a sigh of relief, "excuse me a second!"

He was glad to slip away; to hear his friend, her who to him was something different from anybody in the world, discussed in this strain sickened and

offended him. It was suddenly revealed to his perception that the way in which very young men were wont to talk of the opposite sex was coarse. He reviled himself for having previously been blaming her in his own mind; he said it had put him more on a state of equality with Mr. Walter Finlason. He appeared to have less right to feel indignant.

The platform was besieged by a troop of Irish peasants, perhaps half-a-hundred, men, women, and children, bound for the Emerald Isle after the English harvest, all vociferous in their demands for the Holyhead train, and launching furious imprecations at the officials. The Chester railway station is its most crowded spot at night, and several loiterers and passengers with nothing to do, were amusing themselves by chaffing the infuriated mob, while

Finlason, thoroughly in his element, had commenced to favour them with "The Wearin' o' the Green" in an improvised brogue, and was entreating them "to be strong in the chorus." Even when Allan rejoined him, and he comprehended that the epistle had been despatched, it was some time before he would consent to abandon the recreation, and Morris, for whom this kind of schoolboy imbecility held no amusement, withdrew a few paces and fumed with impatience.

Presently he noticed an old woman with a child, standing apart from the rest; she was not swearing—had finished probably—nor was she at the instant exclaiming "Holyhead," but she wore a wistful expression that was very touching, and the child had tears on her grimy face. Obeying an impulse he stepped forward and gave

her a shilling. He had once when without a shilling in his pocket, gone in to a pawnbroker's and borrowed half-a-crown on his umbrella to satisfy an importunate beggar, because he thought he heard a sob in the man's petition; and now his spirits momentarily rose as she called down benedictions on his head. He knew Violet would have liked his action if she had witnessed it, and—he was conscious it detracted from the merit—he could not quite help wishing she had.

“Come along,” said Finlason at his elbow, “it isn't eleven o'clock; if you hurry up I'll show you the finest woman in Chester. ‘Jam,’ my boy, and ‘yours truly’ is on it! Oh, no, Tommy rot, we must have a drink before we turn in, come on!”

So remembering the hotels would be closing shortly, and hardly seeing an

alternative, he suffered himself to be piloted through the peaceful streets into a third-rate bar, where they encountered two acquaintances of his escort's, both in covert coats and brown billycock hats, lolling across the maple, and being brilliant for the admiration of a divinity with dirty fingers and orange-coloured hair. And he said, "How d'ye do? pleased to meet you," to each of this pair in turn, neither of whose names he caught, and was introduced to the "fine woman" in familiar address as "Mr. Thingamabob, Miss Clara."

"What are you going to have?" said Finlason.

"I'll have 'Scotch.'"

"Two of the 'usual;' and what's yours, Miss Clara?"

Miss Clara would take "a port wine," being a divinity with an eye to business,

and reflecting that it represented a larger profit to the house than was accruing from whiskey. She said, "Well, my bes' respex!" when she sipped it, and observed, furthermore, that Master Finlason was a very bad boy for not having been to see her all day, and that she did not know if she meant to speak to him at all. This playfully, with a toss of the orange-peel tresses and a feinted retreat. Then Finlason the reckless possessed himself of the dirty hand, and inquired where she thought she was going, to which she replied (with a redundancy of negatives) that she was not going anywhere, but it was not to be expected she should stop there all night and talk to parties who had passed the window a dozen times that morning and not come in; whereat he guffawed loudly, and winked at Allan, though Allan thought the

humour of the retort obscure; and the two young gentlemen in billycock hats, having emptied their glasses, were convulsed also, and speculated whether they would be invited to partake in the next "round."

The place was uncommonly close, and it reeked of stale tobacco. In contradistinction to the beauty of the night outside, they were surrounded by gaudy lithographs, the flare of gas-jets, and stupid laughter; and Allan loathed the weakness that had prevented his refusal to come; he loathed the jests and the babble; he loathed Walter Finlason for flirting with a barmaid half-an-hour after he had been in the society of Violet; and then he tried to determine if he could be exaggerating this horror for his own approval, in order that he might feel less unworthy of her friendship himself.

He paid for what was designated "the same again," and, reminding Finlason that their destinations lay in opposite localities, went out alone. He was grateful for the solitude; he could think of her more fittingly in the pure fresh air. The reproachful eyes which came before him were no longer so incongruous with his situation; he could— anomaly of pain—abandon himself more completely to his unhappiness. "Un-generous," she had termed him—"How ungenerous you are!" It was their first difference, and caused by the greenhorn he had left pressing a barmaid's hand. He was disappointed, hurt, and angry all at once; and to last him for pocket-money until Monday he had just sixpence. But rankling through his mortification, one thought was uppermost: she had "defended" this fellow against himself, against *him*—her FRIEND.

And he dogmatized like another Mr. Tupper in his *feuilletons* for a society paper, and was writing a novel analyzing the infinite emotions of the soul!





CHAPTER III.

PROBABLY few social questions have been more extensively debated than the possibility—but should it not be rather the durability—of Platonic attachments. The majority of persons, chiefly women, too, which is noteworthy, hold the notion impracticable altogether, and pronounce its trial flirtation, its name an alias, and its “intellectual affinities” all bosh. This, however, is sheer nonsense; there have been many instances of Platonic attachment since the world began, but the force of the theory expounded by the Athenian

philosopher has seldom been strikingly illustrated by either young men or beautiful girls, and Allan Morris slowly realized the fact that he was "in love." He did not say, in the popular phrase, he had been "deceived in his own feelings;" he said his feelings had changed. Nor did the truth suddenly come upon him in the traditional blinding flash; he awoke to it very gradually, so gradually that he could never rightly tell when he was conscious of it first, and admitting that Miss Dyas had grown a great deal dearer to him than a friend could ever be, he was not by any means exhilarated by the discovery.

He had known love's counterfeit before his majority, and more than once—a less uncommon thing than it may sound for only sons who are no saints and whose fathers provide them with liberal allowances; but

there had been no thought of marriage in these cases, and, indeed, marriage was an event he had never considered, excepting as people think of death—not as an equal calamity, nor as a calamity at all, but as something very indefinite and remote. On those rare occasions when his fancy had assumed a sort of vague outline he had always seen himself with grey hair in a long dining-room, such as his parents had had in Kensington, and there had been a good deal of lamplight on silver, and children made their appearance presently in white frocks with blue ribbons, to be amusing at dessert, and were removed, as soon as they cried, to the nursery upstairs.

Having come to give the matter more attention, he perceived he had taken it for granted his would be a prosperous marriage, and he recollected what a long way from

being prosperous he was. "In love!" What was the use of being in love when he had not even enough money to pay for the wedding-ring? Of course, there were couples who did not have mahogany tables and crystallized fruits for the children to be brought down to, or nurseries either—husbands and wives who lived in outlandish districts like Islington or Peckham, and cut up their babies' dinners for them before they ate their own; but their existence occurred to him rather in the manner of a revelation, and he certainly had no desire to be one of them. Moreover, he was doubtful whether he could care for a woman deeply under conditions like these. His aspirations as regards matrimony were those of a visionary or a millionaire; his wife, Violet—he wanted Miss Dyas for his wife—ought to move through a kind of

Eaton Hall (he had lately been over to see it) arrayed in the most exquisite *toilettes*. For accessories there should be pictures and statuary, or flower-banks and spreading trees; there was the plash of a fountain in his reverie, and sometimes the fountain widened into a lake. Her days should be passed in an atmosphere of luxury and art—and then he would love her as no woman had been loved before. But—there was the “but”—to own her poor and shabby would destroy his illusions about her, and hurt him. Alone, he could bear privation stoically enough; at a pinch he could himself purchase the steak for his dinner, and take it away in his pocket with little more than a natural reluctance, but he was far from sure he could kiss the hand of the wife he had seen sorting chops at a butcher’s, and carrying them home after-

wards wrapped in a piece of newspaper, be her selection made never so tenderly with a view to his own satisfaction and enjoyment.

He was no hero ; that is a title few men can claim. For every hero who blazons his name on history there are a thousand heroines who go down to their graves wheeling perambulators ; and had the typical six-roomed house in Peckham been attainable, he would still have hesitated to propose, less from the knowledge of how little she would gain than from dread of the discomfort to himself which might ensue from her acceptance.

All this, though, pertained to the primary stage, and must not be confounded with the development. Not many of us rise from comparative indifference to the unselfishness of a great love at a bound,

although we all pretend we do ; and most human beings happily betrothed can look back with wonder to detect how mildly they really loved at a period when they thought they adored. In scarcely more than a week, Mr. Morris's ideas had suffered considerable modification, and in a fortnight he was assured that three hundred a year, and Violet, would fulfil every worldly ambition in his heart save fame, which was a surprisingly rapid descent from the expanding fountain and the stately trees, and argued that he was becoming fonder of her every hour.

In truth he was ; the temporary estrangement had long since been forgotten. On the Sabbath following that memorable Thursday he had gone to Morning Service at the Cathedral, and in lieu of making direct for the seat next those

Mrs. Carroll and her niece always occupied, had sneaked guiltily by, and sunk into a chair close to the choir-screen. Presently, amid the rustle of arrivals, during that scarcely perceptible murmur which is the prelude to the simultaneous hush which falls directly the choir and clergy enter, something had seemed to tell him that Miss Dyas and the widow were near, and, although unobserved himself, his heart had given a sudden leap as, turning slightly, he saw them advancing towards their accustomed places up the nave. Once—it was when the “Te Deum” was being sung—he turned again, and for a single instant Violet’s and his own eyes met. There was no longer the reproach he was recalling in hers; they were dimmed merely by a shade of sadness that shamed him through and through, and then they were lowered to her book

once more. The solemnity of the great edifice, the pure exalted look upon the childish face, brought there by the hymn of praise her whole soul seemed offering, and glorified and deepened by the sunlight streaming through the pictured glass above their heads, made his grievance appear unworthy and insignificant; and joining them outside when Chester was greeting Chester with its friendly commonplaces about the sermon, the pair had been reconciled with half-a-dozen words and a clasp of the hand.

“Can you forgive me?” he had whispered, and she had answered—

“Oh, so freely; I am so glad!”

And then he had walked home with them, and they had had some music in the afternoon, and the renewed familiarity sundered for just two days had

seemed more sweet to the boy and girl than ever.

It was a pity it did not last, he thought now, with its placidness and peace. For what could he hope, even if her friendship had altered to something warmer too ; could he ask her to wait for him on prospects as sorry as his ? And, also, if he did succeed in winning, not the imaginary park and mansion, but, say, a modest competence, was not his first duty to his mother, spending her old age amid the dreariness of an Earl's Court boarding-house—the mother whose affection he had known all his five-and-twenty years, and who in her ill-fortune had only him to count on to redeem the vagaries of those injudicious investments of the past ? It was she who should spur him to exertion, her for whom he should tax his brain and strain each nerve, not Violet. And yet Violet was so

dear, so dear ! He was pursued by a feverish unrest, his novel was almost abandoned : it was sufficient effort each week to turn out the necessary four columns for the "Society Echo ;" and after his customary stroll, he returned either exuberantly joyful because of an invitation to go round to Powis Lodge, or in a state of funereal depression because neither aunt nor niece had been encountered. He simply went out to see them—his solitary promenade was bounded by the corners which he knew they must pass ; and if he paused, it was to inspect a jeweller's window and decide what present he would like to buy for Violet, or to credit himself with an account at the London and Westminster, and conceive his sensations were he about to astonish her with a necklace of pearls—pearls were more adapted to her than diamonds. Yes, the jeweller's windows

had a strong attraction for him, and when a young man takes to staring dreamily at a display of brooches and bracelets, it always means one thing.

The "Rows," those double lines of shops one on top of the other, baffled him; when he was on the pavement he was afraid she might be walking over his head unknown to him, and when he was on the wooden way above, he trembled with the fear that he was missing the sight of her below. He said it was a crack-brained town, specially designed for the perplexity of people who were anxious to meet without appointments.

But *was* she anxious—in the sense in which he was? That was the point; he would have preferred to see the greeting smile he had formerly found so charming in its frankness a trifle less frank now; to have heard the welcoming words which three weeks ago

had seemed so perfect, more hesitating, and not quite so gay. He did not think a girl who had fallen in love with him would have been so unembarrassed as Violet was; and then he reminded himself his acquaintance with young girls was limited, and said probably they were not incessantly blushing and faltering outside the pages of the "Family Herald."

One unsettled morning, after he had been pacing his "beat" for nearly an hour, alternately scanning the sky and scrutinizing the forms of distant pedestrians, he discerned the familiar little figure approaching. She was a long way off, but there was something in Violet's carriage that proclaimed her before one could distinguish her features, her dancing hair, or even the colour of her dress; and to Allan, the watery sun which had been filling him with misgivings

immediately beamed divinely. She was not alone, although she sometimes was—Mrs. Carroll being no great walker and easily tired—but accompanied or not she had come, and he could saunter beside her and shake hands with her twice before they parted, and if, prior to the moment of leave-taking, he were able to devise some suggestion for her removing her right glove, why, he would feel her dear hand still more.

And so, presently, he was hearing how they had nearly remained indoors altogether, “it looked so showery,” and saying calmly he was glad they had changed their minds.

“Only auntie had some shopping to do, you see; that was the inducement,” explained Violet, provokingly.

“I wasn’t, you mean. Mrs. Carroll, will you kindly command your niece to be nice

for the space of twenty minutes," he said.

"Don't, auntie; I can't be nice to order. Haven't you found that out yet, Mr. Allan Morris? I must be taken just as my moods are: if I want to tease, you must be lively and let me; and if I'm serious when you're cheerful, then you have to become serious too!"

"Is that your idea of friendship?" laughed the widow.

"Never mind, I always tease the people I like best the most," she added.

"Tease me a lot," he begged, under his breath, "will you?"

"Now we have to go to the stationer's," she continued, "and the draper's, and the—what is it? the buttermen's. Are we going to take him to buy butter, auntie? And if you're good—not properly good, of course,

I'm not unreasonable, but good for *you*—you shall be allowed to 'shop' with us."

"What a treat for Mr. Morris. Do his spirits rise?"

"They do, they're at the top of the barometer, thermometer, the—what do you measure spirits by? the . . ."

"Pint," said Violet, "we shall have to send you to school again! How dare you try to write a novel? No wonder you say you are not getting on."

How silly it was; just as silly as ordinary everyday conversation is with the tones that give it warmth and life frozen into printers' ink. There were none of the epigrams with which the dialogue in fiction always "bristles," and their jokes were not even funny enough to commend themselves to a "lion comique."

How sweet it was! Sweet because he was with her, because he could watch the sudden smiles stealing over the girlish lips and have her appeal to him now and again for his advice anent some trifling outlay. Because, with a tinge of shyness that made his pulses quicken, she would perhaps offer him one of her tiny acquisitions to carry, exactly as he had so often begged her to do before he could proffer his services in a polite formula; and this, indeed, was the sweetest of all, since it permitted him to feel she was learning to regard his assistance as her right.

Empty pleasures, without a doubt! The sort of unsubstantial happiness we sneer at in others when we are at an age at which it takes so much that is practical to make *us* happy. We mutter "boy and girl" disdainfully, and toss aside the novel that treats of

them when our own youth is so long gone by, it almost seems like somebody's else. But is there not a dash of envy in our jeer, men and women ?

Sometimes, while Mrs. Carroll went in to match that particular shade of silk, or to settle the newspaper bill, they waited for her together outside, and on one of these occasions :

“ You wanted me to be grave to-day,” Violet said.

“ How do you know that ? ” he demanded.

“ I could see it ; yours is a very copy-book face, your sentiments are written on it for all to read ! You were disappointed ? ”

“ No, not disappointed ; I was dull rather. I thought I should have met you earlier, for one thing, and, besides . . .

I am discouraged. What on earth have I got to look forward to; what can I ever expect to attain?"

It was characteristic of her that she did not retort that he was no worse off this morning than he had been yesterday or the morning before. She replied, "Every man can carve his own career if he only *will*, if he is only resolute, and steadfast to the end in view! If I were a man——"

"Oh, yes, if you were a man you think you would work miracles, every girl does! How can you tell how much or how little I may have to dishearten me?"

"Is it . . . may I ask you? Is it a money trouble more than——"

"More than usual? Well, I hardly know. I . . . I haven't lost a fortune overnight, I couldn't very well, could I?"

But I'm getting older . . . I think more and . . . and everything's wrong!" he concluded, comprehensively.

"I wish——" she exclaimed.

"What do you wish, Miss Dyas?"

"What a long time Aunt Bertha is!" she said.

"I wish," he remonstrated, irritably, "you wouldn't perpetually begin remarks, and break off after the first two words! It's tantamount to saying, 'I did propose to honour you with a confidence, my good sir, but, on consideration, you're not worthy of it!' You are continually doing it, and it hurts!"

"How easily you do let the clouds come!" she said, half sadly, half amused. "Your temper is like April weather, without the slightest warning the sun goes in, and it's pouring with rain!"

"I beg your pardon! Don't be angry, are you?"

"Not that; 'angry,' oh, no! Only *you* hurt sometimes, and you never think so; you are so quick to find a grievance, you don't say, 'Might not my friend have a reason? Might there not be a motive, an explanation, that I don't see?' You are not always kind!"

"I am sorry," he murmured; "I'll be more careful for the future, I promise you I will. I am trying to please you, Miss Dyas, hard!"

"And I have faults, too," she went on humbly, "I am arbitrary; I never look at the other side of a question, but always imagine my own is the golden one . . . I am going to tell you what it was I intended to say!"

"Thank you, very much. Oh, here is

your aunt already. Well, Mrs. Carroll, are the lease and good-will obtained ? ”

“Have I been long, the place was so full I could not get served ? What have we to do next, Vi ? ”

“Chintz ! ” averred Violet, brightly. “He shall come in there with us, and help us choose a pretty pattern. Aren’t you flattered, my lord ? Cross the road ! ”

And he did enter with them, remembering how impatient he had been when condescending to dawdle through Peter Robinson’s in the wake of his mother, and comparing those past emotions in a draper’s shop with the present.

“Not that there are any pretty patterns to choose,” commented the widow, as she turned over the specimens submitted, “and they generally have such good ones here ! How do you like this, Vi ? ”

"This," was a jumble of infinitesimal flowers, very vivid and with a good deal of scarlet and yellow about it, but Violet accommodatingly declared it would do, "she wanted something small, you know," and then, while the elder woman was calculating quantities, beckoned Allan to come closer, and told him to guess what it was for.

"Curtains," he hazarded brilliantly.

"'Curtains' ! listen. Isn't he getting intelligent ? Quite beginning to 'take notice.' No, it isn't for curtains—a yard and a quarter will be plenty, thanks—nor is it for a tea-gown."

"Well, I'm glad it is not," he rejoined ; "it may be dazzling, but it isn't beautiful."

"Don't you presume to 'boo' at my cretonne, sir, but find out what it's for."

Then Mrs. Carroll threw back her head to afford a cue, and though Violet, catching

her in the act, indignantly called them a pair of "mean conspirators," he cried, "Pillow," without fear of contradiction; and directly the hint had been supplied marvelled he could have forgotten how often he had heard her speak of re-covering that shabby little bag of feathers which was one of her pet belongings.

"Mine own familiar sofa-cushion," she said, "and I'm going to make it a new frock."

"Were you fond of dolls?" asked Allan, and then burst out laughing, the question was so ridiculous.

"No, I never was! Why?"

"Nothing; I was wondering, that's all."

But he had just been fancying her as a child, and wishing they had encountered one another when he could have kissed her as often as he liked. It appeared so strange to

reflect she had once run about with a dirty mouth and been smacked, and that he might not have wanted to kiss her if he had had the chance.

“You are being so extremely entertaining, you two,” said Mrs. Carroll, “that I do not even mean to offer an excuse. I am going to order some Gruyère and things, and you may both adorn the doorstep. In point of fact, you reminded me of it, Mr. Morris; ‘Were you fond of dolls’ was faintly suggestive of the query, ‘Does your brother like cheese?’ Do not run away.”

They stood for a moment looking after her, and then :

“Now !” said Allan.

The girl was silent. If she preferred to confess what the unadmitted thought had been to him when they were alone, it was solely from respect for his own feelings,

and that "now" jarred upon her slightly : it sounded disloyal to the absent, and it struck him as an error, too, directly it was spoken.

He looked an apology, and she looked away.

"Will you tell me?" he said, gently.

"It was very stupid: I was going to say, 'I wish my age . . . I wish I had already reached my majority.' Now you are no wiser than you were!"

"Not much," he owned.

"Listen: you would do plenty for me, wouldn't you? If your friend said to you, 'I want a sacrifice,' you would make it. Not, oh, not because your self-esteem would suffer by a refusal, but because you would really and truly be glad to help?"

"You know I would," he asserted, "you know I would do anything to make you

happy, and count it a privilege—you know it!”

“Yes, I do,” she answered, “and the knowledge is very precious; a friendship like that . . . Oh, it is beautiful!”

“I would give you my life,” he added huskily, after a pause.

They were outside the provision stores as he uttered this assurance. Somebody's servant had just run in for a pound's worth of silver, and an errand-boy was coming out whistling with a basket over his arm. Allan stood in a little sprinkling of sawdust that had fallen from a newly-opened egg-box, and the girl's face was turned towards five fitches of “Our own cured bacon” suspended on hooks, and ticketed “Mild.” They, however, noted nothing incongruous in their surroundings: they were both in deadly earnest.

"Therefore, on the other hand," she pursued, "you ought to be equally willing to accept, and if I were one-and-twenty—I wish I had never begun this; you won't be offended—I could say to you . . . let me lend you some money."

The middle fitch had become an object of the deepest interest: there was a fly on it, and she watched the insect travelling along the bones. Each second seemed a minute, and when at length she glanced at him, the change in his expression startled her.

"You have money?" he ejaculated.
"Good Lord!"

He would sooner she had told him she had a wooden leg. It was the final obstacle between them, he felt; there were difficulties enough in the way without this. Scarcely three weeks ago he had been un-

certain whether his love could survive the continual sight of her in soiled collars and cheap boots; but, at least, he had always been positive he would prefer an existence typified by grimy tablecloths and three-pronged forks, as long as he lived, to being indebted for luxury to the woman he married. It may not have been a virtue, it may have been a false pride; but the feeling was there. Something of what was passing in his brain was communicated to her by his voice, though not all.

“It is very little — about a hundred and twenty a year,” she said, deprecatingly. “I can sympathize with you just as fully.”

“Where did you get it from?” In the astonishment caused by her avowal he had assumed an air of authority which was new to him.

“My grandfather left me all he had,” she murmured. “We always knew he meant to.”

“Her father? I should have thought he might have left it to your aunt.”

“She had bought an income, a—what do you call it?—an ‘annuity,’ when Uncle Edward, when her husband died. She did not need it; she and Mr. Finlason are the trustees . . . It is hardly nice of you to be sorry.”

“‘Nice!’” he echoed, passionately. “How is it possible you can be so wise in some respects and so young in others? ‘Nice’ of me! I fervently wish you had kept the information to yourself.”

“And so do I,” she exclaimed, “more fervently! You are unjust — you are rude . . . and I meant so well to you. I

was sorry for you. You—you have taught me a lesson.”

“The sooner your aunt obtains her cheese ‘and things’ the better, I think,” he said, doggedly, the more doggedly because he was contrite. “I suppose it is my fate to anger you every quarter of an hour! . . . Oh, no! I can’t bear to quarrel with you; I can explain. Miss Dyas——”

“I forgive,” she said, softly. “Ah, don’t grieve like that, *please!* I forgive.”

“How good you are!” he whispered; and Mrs. Carroll came out.

She had had to say “I forgive” very frequently of late, he reflected mournfully as he accompanied them as far as their house, and he was incessantly showing himself to the worst advantage. How could he avoid it when she was ignorant

of his unhappiness, and expected him to be as light-hearted as herself.

“Are you going to honour us by-and-by?” asked her aunt, pulling the bell.

“May I? Thanks, awfully. I’ll be round about six, then. *Au revoir!*”

“*Au revoir,*” said Violet, cheerfully. “Why not at five?”

He had wounded her acutely, but she liked him very much, and she knew he had regretted his ill-humour on the instant. It was the way of her. If a person had insulted her, and she had seen his lip quiver in self-reproach directly afterwards, the resentment within her would have melted immediately, and instead she would have experienced the most pitiful compassion, as if he had been the victim and she the aggressor. Still, it had been an ugly termination to a pleasant morning, and she

could not help deeming Allan unreasonable.

In his fit of chagrin he had declared she was in many things far older than her years, and in others no more than seventeen and a-half, and perhaps even less. She attributed her "friend's" mortification to the notion that her possession of a little money must prevent her entering absolutely into his struggles and pursuits, must divide them insomuch as it made their stand-points dissimilar, and again dull her comprehension of the difficulties he had so often confided to her with those bitter allusions to their difference from the ease in which he had been brought up.

Many men would have asserted she was flirting with Allan; almost all women would. But if, indeed, she had been, then the tendency towards flirtation is an

inherent quality in every feminine organization, which, unlike all other appetites, is capable of flourishing and being fed without recognition from the mind; for the accusation would have at once startled and dismayed her: she would have averred with flaming cheeks she had never “flirted” in her life, and the term “coquette” would have conveyed such cruel reproach to her ingenuous nature, and the somewhat grave simplicity of her ideas, that—rare occurrence with her—it might even have made her cry. It may be concluded, therefore, either that the judgment of the vast majority would have been wrong, and Miss Violet Dyas right against the host, or that this propensity for flirtation is an implanted instinct in the purest flesh and blood a Divine Hand ever moulds into innocent girlhood, and may be indulged unconsciously.

She was painting, when Allan was shown in, a mirror for a bracket.

“I’m not going to leave off,” she said, “am I?”

“Why, certainly not,” he answered, relieved to find there was to be no restraint; “I’ll come and watch!”

He liked her to continue her occupation whenever she was busy at the time he was announced; any omission of ceremony, as in that other instance when, unsolicited, she gave him something to carry for her, always delighted him. As he wheeled a chair to her side, Dandy, her aunt’s “King Charles,” just lying in her lap, sprang to the ground and would have run to his mistress. Allan stooped down, lifting him to his knees, and thence to his face, and laid his cheek against the curly coat.

It was an effeminate action, but the dog

had come direct from *her*; at odd moments her hand had been fondling him, and, to the boy's excited fancy, the little breathing animal seemed for a second warm with her own life.

When twilight made painting impracticable any longer, "You shall help me wash my brushes!" she said, and Mrs. Carroll rang to order the essentials. As chance would have it, the servant, misunderstanding her instructions, prepared them to be used in the next room, where the operation was always performed, and after waiting some time, surprised at the delay, Violet discovered the mistake.

"Never mind," she said, "I'll go in there!"

"Am I to come, too?" asked Allan, ostensibly of her, but glancing at the elder woman.

“Yes, go on,” said Mrs. Carroll, “and make haste, both of you.”

It was a sanctum of the girl's own they went into, where she amused herself by writing tales, a small apartment sparsely furnished, its most noticeable features being a rocking-chair and a low table without a cover. Another door opened on to a flight of stairs, and, at Allan's suggestion, she ran up to fetch an apron to protect her dress. He had never been alone with her in a room before, excepting now and then for a minute, and when she reappeared with it, and he helped her to put it on, he was surprised to perceive his hand was shaking. It was because he had hoped to help her that he had advised her to wear it, but he had not known the process would affect him so deeply as this. She stood still; and he, tenderly pushing the hair that framed her

face, aside, passed the straps gently across her shoulders.

“Thanks,” she said; “come along!”

She ensconced herself in the rocking-chair, and Allan, to lower his height to the desirable level, knelt upon a hassock. For a while they stirred the brushes silently: he because a myriad emotions hitherto undreamed of seemed surging to his throat and choking him; she because some germ of his agitation had reached her childishness, and was puzzling her by its novelty. He felt his heart thumping violently, and wondered if she could hear it; she abandoned herself to this new sensation that she could not analyze, but which stole through her being like a current, bringing neither warmth, nor joy, nor peace, only an unaccustomed tremor that perplexed her by its strangeness.

“Do you know what I am thinking?” he said, hoarsely.

“What?” she asked.

“I was thinking I told you I could explain . . . that there is so much I have been wanting to say to you; and now that I’ve got the chance I am washing paint brushes and saying nothing. I . . .”

He could not, for the life of him he *could* not find phrases to express himself—the words would not come, and he was generally so fluent!

“Why should you explain at all?” she murmured. “I have forgiven you; it is over, isn’t it?”

She was acting. This girl, with her high conceptions of truth and honour, she who would have scorned the meanness of a lie as she would have shrunk from the stigma of a sin, was acting now. She

knew! The knowledge of his love, which had not penetrated her simplicity in the morning, when it would have been apparent to the intelligence of any boarding-school miss by his passion, had contradictorily been borne upon her by—what? It had rushed in upon her all at once; she knew his feelings had changed, and she knew her own had not. And from that instant the girl of seventeen and a-half was older than he.

“Why should you explain at all?” she said.

The air was strong with the smell of turpentine. As long as he lives, the unromantic odour will always bring before him the remembrance of that mite of a room, in the gloaming, overlooking a backyard, and the figure of a girl in a holland apron nestling against the cushion she had re-

juvenated with the vivid chintz. He was feigning to scrape the palette. She leant forward to take a brush from the basin, and as she did so a drop of the hot water splashed upon his hand. It called him to himself. He looked up, and she smiled nervously. In another moment the palette and knife had clattered to the floor, and he was grasping her paint-stained fingers in his own.

“Miss Dyas! . . . I love you! I used to be your friend, but I’m not any more; it has altered, somehow. . . . I don’t know . . . but it has altered, it . . . oh, my dear, I love you so! I oughtn’t to have told you, I know. I have no position, and, besides, you have money—you may think it is your money I want. Ah, if you were in rags! That was it when you told me this morning that made me look so ungrateful—such a

boor; but I wasn't ungrateful—I wasn't ungrateful, Violet. Only your offer to . . . to . . . lend me money . . . Oh, darling, can't you guess what it made me suffer? I oughtn't to have said this to you—I ought to have kept it to myself and never let you know I loved you, but I wasn't able. Don't think badly of me because you make me weak! I want you to understand what I'm feeling; I want to make you know what is in my heart just as I do myself, but I can't—I can't! I always thought I could if I only dared. I thought there wouldn't be a thought left you didn't know, but now all the words are gone, and I can only say, 'I love you!' Violet . . ."

He had spoken because he was bound to speak, because he felt he could contain himself no longer; but his mouth was dry, and the English language in its entirety had

appeared to be fading away from him more irrecoverably every second. Now there was a pause.

"I am sorry," she said. (He noticed, regretfully, how much more self-possessed she was than he.) "Many girls might be proud to hear what you have told me. I am not; excepting, of course, as every girl must be proud to have won such . . . such a love. I mean, it does not flatter me; it makes me sad."

It was his answer. They both rose, and he did not protest at all. If you come to think about it, the scope for argument in these matters from a man with nothing a-year to a girl who does not love him is limited.

"Shall we go back to the drawing-room," she suggested; "Aunt Bertha will be waiting."

“Yes,” he replied, “let us go back ; I am quite ready !”

Both spoke in the low constrained tone one adopts when there is a death in the house.

“Miss Dyas . . . may I remain your friend ?”

“Oh, if you will !” she said.

“I will try ; I promise I will try !”

In confirmation of the promise, he made an impulsive movement towards her, and half held out his arms. Her eyes met his fully, without wavering, and she drew back the very smallest step to be conceived.

That was all ; only he had asked her to let him kiss her, and she had said “No.” He had begged it of her ; he had hungered to kiss her at that crisis with the whole intensity of the hunger which, in his great dumb pain, seemed gnawing and tearing

inside his breast, like some maddened creature struggling to get free; and she had refused.

Afterwards he remembered how for the purposes of art he had once speculated on the terms in which such a refusal would be couched, and then he knew the passionate petition and dignified denial of his book were alike false and unreal. What he did not know was that the love he believed to already fill his heart, in fact scarcely occupied one corner of it, but that it was ordained to grow, and would one day be precisely as big as his soul. His prospects as a novelist were improving: he had begun to discover what love is.



CHAPTER IV.

THREE agreeable events are distinguished in the ordinary life feminine: they are the debût, the earliest "declaration," and the wedding. After the wedding, pleasure has its alloy of responsibility, and events are no longer to be characterized as "agreeable," but may be either joys or pain, according to the way you look at them.

In this case, however, a girl had missed the sense of elation usually connected with the second epoch of maidenhood, for Allan's confession had been no triumph to Violet at all. There is no rule without

exceptions, and sometimes it is like this; sometimes the verbs to "come out," and to listen, and to wed, are all three irregular, and there is no enjoyment at the root of any one of them. The "life feminine" may wait three consecutive vales as a contribution to the floral decorations, or she may be compelled to decline the suitor she wants to accept, or she may accept the man she would do better to decline, and, in consequence, be sworn at and neglected until a beneficent providence enables her to buy crape for her release and a tablet to his virtues.

Violet considered it a great pity the friendship between Allan and herself had been disturbed; it could never flow so evenly again, she felt that, although she had not sufficient worldly wisdom to be aware that on his side at least it could be

nothing henceforward but the poorest pretence. She had spoken the truth, she was unfeignedly sorry, and, *naïvely* enough, she almost wished her own feelings had changed too, because it seemed unkind of her to have won so much and to be unable to give equally in return. Then, tempering her regret, came a little glow of complaisance at recalling the composure she had contrived to counterfeit, followed by a quick self-reproach that it should be possible for her to discover any food for gratification, even the slightest, in a situation which to Mr. Morris must of course have meant a grief. She did not attempt to decide how the existence of his love had dawned upon her, by what indication or influence the premonition of what was coming had occurred; not being psychologically interested it had not struck

her there was anything remarkable about it. What she did say was: "I suppose I must be an awful simpleton for my age; I wonder I didn't see he was" (blush) "in love with me before!" After that she laughed rather feebly, and then she sighed a little, and finally rumbled the wavy mass of hair upon her forehead most ruthlessly, which was a certain sign she was perplexed and thinking her hardest. Marriage! She was thoroughly heart-whole, but she had a higher conception of its duties and its sweetness than Allan had possessed even when he had already begun to fancy himself the prey to a consuming passion. It would mean Love; the love that would go ragged and ill-fed for the other's sake, and find reward in a hand-clasp or a smile. It would mean a great and tender reverence for her

husband; on his side the strength to guide her and direct; on hers the strength to soothe him and console. It would mean, alas, parting from Aunt Bertha who was as much as the dearest mother to her, and—oh, she hoped Mr. Morris did not mind particularly, but he was not the least bit in the world like the man she could ever . . . marry! Why could he not have been content as things were? She dared say it was not exactly his fault, but he had disappointed her, nevertheless, their friendship had been so perfect!

Not very deep emotions, perhaps, for a girl whose face in repose hinted at the latent potentiality to love like a Juliet, but the reflections of a thoroughly good one at any rate, and an exceptional one, too, for vanity had scarcely a part in

them. Moreover deep emotions are not apt to be stirred in the breast of a girl under eighteen by a condition of affairs she cannot comprehend, nor, for the matter of that, in the breast of anybody else, comprehension being the key to the emotions; and the most this "conquest" had done for Violet Dyas was to confront her with the first social problem of her experience: she could not determine whether she ought to confide in Mrs. Carroll or lock Allan's disclosure in her own keeping. Child-like, she longed to unbosom herself to her aunt; woman-like, she was loath to betray his secret, and in her conflict between the impulse of delicacy and the horror of concealment, she did not fall asleep till two o'clock, when she slumbered quietly, and dreamed of the most irrelevant frivolities. Allan

Morris at two o'clock being seated before the remnants of a lodging-house fire, miserably reviewing the scene of the afternoon with the additions of what he ought to have said.

Next day, as was natural, the impulse of delicacy went down before the force of habit, and her revelation was made. It was in the morning, and aunt and niece had remained at home, for Mrs. Carroll was ailing again, and now lay back in an easy-chair, with what in the feminine vocabulary is termed a "woolly" about her shoulders. The girl crossed the room to arrange it for her, lingered a little over her task, and next, dropping on her knees beside her, whispered suddenly :

"Auntie, Vi has something to tell you!"

"Yes, dear?"

"I want to tell you my friend doesn't

think of me any longer as he used to do ; but he is going to try to, auntie ; he has promised he will try to, although he is unhappy ! ”

“ My little Vi ! ”

“ It has changed,” she said, wistfully, “ ‘ little Vi’s ’ friendship has been broken ! ”

Then her face drooped in the elder woman’s lap, and for awhile neither spoke.

“ Do you love him, dear ? ” asked Mrs. Carroll, presently :

She did not say, “ Are you fond of him ? ” nor “ Do you care for him ? ” nor employ any of the euphemisms current in that refined section of society where young ladies assure you they “ love tennis passionately,” and “ like their *fiancés* very much.” She said, “ Do you love him ? ” purely and simply, and Violet shook her head under the hand that rested on her curls, and answered softly, “ No.”

“Then, baby, it is better that you and he should not see so much of one another in the future, do you understand? I am afraid I have been unwise, for things might have been still worse. I am not sorry you do not love Mr. Morris, little maiden, although I am sorry for him.”

“But we have settled to remain friends, Aunt Bertha; you wouldn’t have me break my word?”

“I do not think a friendship that has once grown to love ever can become friendship again, however well Mr. Morris may mean and try in his case. Such love sometimes burns to hate, dear, oftener to indifference, but it very seldom goes back to friendship any more. If God had put a love for him into my baby’s heart, and you were both willing to bear the delay that must have been before you could have come

together, I for one would have made no objection; you are both young, and you could have afforded to wait until he was making his way, and the two of you had had time to find out if you were in earnest. Indeed," pursued Mrs. Carroll, musingly, "I have never been able to see any meaning in that expression of a girl 'wasting her best years,' waiting for the poor man whom she loves: surely no years can be 'wasted' of which each day is a step towards the greatest happiness life holds! All the same, it is far, far better as it is, and you will not meet so often now; and . . . and give me a kiss, sweetheart, and don't be a little goose!"

"I feel so guilty," said Violet, brokenly; "he looked so wretched, and his lips were . . . tr . . . tr . . . trembling! Auntie, you won't stop inviting him, will you? oh, he is all alone."

“I shall not forbid him the house, you may be sure,” rejoined the widow with a caress; “I shall merely invite him less often during the rest of the time he is in Chester!”

“But you will not be left together outside shops, and you will not wash paint-brushes by yourselves on future occasions!” she added in a mental addendum.

So in the ensuing fortnight Allan spent only two evenings at Powis Lodge. The former was to a certain extent an ordeal to all three of the personages concerned, and even he scarcely regretted the advent of the hour when he could rise to say “good-night.” They had laughed and chatted as they always did, undeniably, but directly there was a lull in the conversation somebody had been impelled to strike in with a commonplace obviously improvised to avoid

a pause. This, be it observed, is equally a feature of the social gathering where people have really nothing to say to one another, and of the gathering where they have actually too much. On his second visit, though, the restraint had mostly worn off as restraint so speedily does between persons who have been very intimate, and, besides, in the meantime, the encounters outside had recurred.

His hostesses, notwithstanding, did not fail to remark—albeit silently—the weariness of his appearance, for weak and sentimental as it may seem, he was in truth suffering intensely, and two weeks of misery had left their trace on him. Nor is there any doubt that if Violet's liking had been a shade less cordial than it was, his presence would already have become an infliction greater than she chose to endure. His very

attempts at pleasantry were pitiable in their insincerity, and the mute petition in his eyes haunted and depressed her. Once when she and her aunt had returned after one of these fortuitous meetings—"fortuitous" insomuch as they had ceased to be avowedly designed—she rushed upstairs, and violently locking her door gave vent to an outburst of indignation against herself and him. It raged for ten minutes. What had she done that he should distress her so? he had promised to remain her friend, and his every glance was an appeal or an accusation! Could she help it if she could not give him what he asked? did he imagine she could find the feeling among the bushes in the garden, or capture it in the air, or dig for it in the earth? was he mad, or only unjust? he was making her ill with his agony! How was she to blame? She

would not submit to it; it was cowardly of him! . . . Ah, poor fellow, poor fellow. "What are you made of, you piece of stone?" She leant her elbows on the toilet-table and gazed at the reflection of her dark passionate face, out of which all the childishness had for the moment vanished, with lowering brows. "Why cannot you give it to him, why—why? Are you always going to be like this, is there something missing in you, something forgotten? . . . Oh, Heavenly Father, make me like other girls, don't let me be hard or unwomanly! The pain . . . the pain!" Her bosom heaved with sobs, but the tears refused to come, and then the servant knocked to tell her that dinner was ready, and she went down to roast mutton and an apple-pie, and even ate a little, because we do eat roast mutton and apple-pie in real

life while our souls are in a tumult, and, though novelists do not appear to recognize the fact, it is not our appetite we lose in affliction so readily as our sense of taste. Also girls with aunts to be anxious are chary of complaining of headaches, and having "strong tea sent up to their darkened chambers," in the style of the obsolete romances, although it is just possible they may feel as acutely to-day as in the age when they were presumably given to exclaim (as the late Mr. G. W. M. Reynolds so tenderly expresses it) that "The rose of love had been poisoned by the slime of the snail passing over it," and to conduct themselves in a much more idiotic manner generally.

It was not strange Violet should have been barely moved by Allan's words awhile ago, and wrung by a look from him now,

for she was beginning to understand ; and if there had been even a glimmer left of her earlier hope that "Mr. Morris did not particularly mind," a circumstance which occurred at this period must have effectually extinguished it.

She was walking, and, in accordance with her recent custom whenever forced to go out alone, had quitted the house shortly after breakfast, a time when she could rely upon his being at work. The *savoir faire* which springs up in the brain of the most unsophisticated of *demoiselles* as soon as a man is attracted by her has, in the rapidity of its growth, never been equalled by any other product of Nature, except the toadstool. However, she had failed to take into account how much Mr. Morris did mind—for he was far too restless to write or even to remain indoors—and they met.

He strolled along beside her. Both remembered the last occasion on which they had conversed without the presence of a third party, and a little embarrassment was inevitable at first.

"Is Mrs. Carroll not so well?" he asked, lamely.

"She had a bad night," replied the girl, "nothing serious. She is never very strong, you know."

"No, I know," he said.

"Is not this unusual for you? You take your 'constitutional' later, as a rule, do you not?" she inquired.

"Generally, yes; somehow I wasn't in the vein this morning, and I thought exercise might sharpen my wits. Don't put it down to laziness."

"Am I walking too slowly for you?"

“Not a bit, thanks, if I’m not in the way?”

“You are not ‘in the way’ at all,” she said. “I did not mean that.”

Nevertheless she quickened her pace. This exchange of conventionalities with him who had been so dear a friend hurt her.

“Miss Dyas . . . we didn’t talk to each other like this once. . . . Not three weeks ago we should have been speaking freely, you and I.”

“Who has made the difference?” she answered, hastily. “Do you suppose it is a pleasure to me either? Oh, it is your own fault! Why do you say anything about our friendship with its sweetness and its peace now that you have ended it?”

“My ‘fault!’” he echoed. “Do you think I have not battled against caring for you? do you imagine I am enjoying myself?”

My life is a torture! If you knew—if you could see what I am going through, you would pity me, any woman would pity me!”

“I do pity you,” she said, gently, “but I cannot help it. If I could prevent it I would. Can’t you understand what this means to me—the responsibility, the reproach?”

“You have nothing to reproach yourself with, you have never encouraged me. But I have striven and struggled so to put you out of my thoughts, to be to you what you wish, and I can’t. I didn’t want to love you—what had I to do with falling in love, a beggar like me? I didn’t want to bring a grief to you and to myself—why should I? But I do love you with my whole force and my whole soul, and I always shall! ‘Love,’ it is a worship . . . a religion . . . a faith.

You are more to me than a girl to be won—you are an ideal to be reached! When I'm with you I am better and purer than anywhere else. You ennoble me, you raise me nearer to your own level! Oh! my confidante! my comrade! you have done so much for me with your liking, won't you try to complete the good work by your love?"

"Put yourself in my place!" she cried, suddenly facing him. "Suppose a woman had given such a love as this to you, and you had nothing to give her in return, how would it make you feel?"

"I should be very sorry."

"‘Sorry,’" she repeated, "'*sorry!*' I am only a girl, and I daresay, as you once told me, I am 'young' in many things, but to me it is anguish—just anguish—that's what it is! If I were a woman perhaps I should

not care so deeply. I might think it a compliment, something to be pleased about, but I'm not clever enough to look at it in that way, and you are simply breaking my heart with your entreaties ! ”

“What can I do ? ” he said, “what can I do ? ”

“I don't know what you can do. You promised you would be still my friend ; now you say it is impossible. But weren't we happy, weren't we content, in those days, think ? There was no trouble then, none of this wretchedness, . . . and mine is here, my friendship for you, the same as ever, in full, only waiting for you to ask for it honestly again ! ”

“‘Friendship ! ’ ” he exclaimed, “you are killing one of the most beautiful words in the language for me—you are killing it ; I am growing to hate the sound of it from

you or anybody else. I beg to you for bread, and you offer me a stone! Some author vows no living creature is so absolutely cruel as a woman to the lover for whom she does not care, and it is true. You are cruel unconsciously; your very kindness is cruel. Friendship is the shadow of what I have given to you, and you complain because it does not satisfy me. You might have known I should get fond of you, you must have known it. 'Young,' you are not a baby! But did you keep away from me, did you do anything to avert it? No! You even saw what I was going to tell you that afternoon before I spoke; you could have stopped it then, only you didn't choose! Ah! your eyes look as though you could love as not one woman in a million can love, and the rest of your face is like a saint's, but everything is *in* your

face. You are exactly the same as any other girl in your disposition."

"Just now you said I had never encouraged you," she retorted, piteously; "you are not consistent."

"And you haven't; I am a liar. You never have encouraged me! I didn't mean it, Violet, I didn't mean it. You couldn't guess what it was all leading to—I didn't guess myself. Don't hate me for that taunt; I ought to be horsewhipped for it. I could tear my tongue out; I know I am damaging my chance with every word . . . Oh, little Vi, why did I ever see you?"

She did not refer to his use of her Christian name; it seemed a small matter in the midst of all this, and they walked on swiftly in silence. Her very endeavour to escape an encounter with him had prolonged his opportunity, for, to make assurance

doubly sure, she had avoided the town, and been a considerable distance from home when they met. She wondered despairingly what she was to say; wondered if he had any conception of the agony he was inflicting by these irrational, perpetual supplications for a gift it was not in her command to grant; questioned what this mysterious power was, given to a girl—unprayed for and unsought—by the Creator of the sexes, to render her thus potent to sway another human life, to fill another's being; and wished mutely, miserably, devoutly, she could turn to him and admit that the feeling for which he was hungering had come. How speedily she might transform his pain to joy. In a sentence, with a smile, why could she not do it?—it was not there! “Oh! am I made of stone?” she asked herself again.

“Listen,” he said, humbly; “I forgot myself, and I ask your pardon. You must consider me unreasonable, stupid, to keep on craving to you for what you haven’t got, and I *should* be if I didn’t want it so—so intensely—if I could do without it. Remember, I didn’t plead in this way before, I was much more manly and much less fervent; I didn’t love you as I do now. It has become part of me, my love for you. I can’t take the heart out of my body, and I can’t take the love out of my heart. If the people passing could overhear what I am saying, they would laugh, they would think I was either acting or deceiving myself, because I am still what is called a ‘boy,’ and the love of a boy is never believed in. Perhaps you, without any experience, are more clear-sighted in this case than all the men and women of the world would be put together;

for, at any rate, you don't doubt my sincerity, though you can hardly realize that I am beginning to wish myself dead. I am as proud as you are, and to sue and sue to you in this helpless fashion is terrible : it is as though I were beating my hands against a wall ! I may beat ! I can go on till I am all bruised and bleeding, but the wall doesn't move an inch It is far better for you that you don't care for me, I don't attempt to deny it ; there are so many obstacles between us, more even than you know, and it would be a very weary waiting for you at the best, but from morning to night I am thinking of you, it is a fact, from morning to night ! I can't write, I am not able to settle to anything ; I think, and think, and think, until my brain goes round and I am half mad : it is generally daylight before I fall asleep, and—yes, you fancy I am going to say, 'and then

every one of my dreams is about you?’ I am not romancing, I am telling you the literal truth : I don’t dream of you at all—I wish I could, I try to ! and when I wake the very first thought that enters my head (it is instantaneous) is, ‘shall I see her to-day ?’ I don’t want to exaggerate, I don’t want to be high-flown, but my life is becoming a veritable hell upon earth, Violet, it is, indeed !”

The great secret of love-making is to know where to leave off, and Allan might have paused at one or another of his previous points with greater advantage. He was not an adept in the “accomplishment,” and he was too thoroughly in earnest to be artistic ; he, therefore, committed the egregious blunder of working in a circle, and had come back to the insistence that he was unhappy, a melancholy truth, but a termination which

suggested no reply. He looked at her wistfully, and receiving no response :

“It was dreary enough before,” he pursued ; “I am not going to assert I was contented, but I was, anyhow, resigned. I don’t assure you I have never imagined myself in love at any other time ; it is because I have, that I am certain of the reality of my love now—the very difference shows it to me ! I can’t sham to you, I can’t feign carelessness and gaiety to lull you into a false sense of security, although I am perfectly aware it would be the wisest course I could adopt ; I would as soon think of deliberately playing a part or telling a lie to you as I would think of smoking in a church, there would be precisely the same feeling of sacrilege ! I have said you are more than a beautiful girl to me, you are something holy ! I believe it was your goodness first attracted

me, it wasn't your appearance; I didn't consider you so particularly beautiful at the commencement—I never had admired dark women to any great extent. I recollect when I saw you in London I said you were very 'pretty!' I ought to swear you realized my idea of feminine perfection from the start, but I am not going to do anything of the kind—I won't say a syllable to you I do not mean. I can say you are the loveliest, as you are the best, of all girls God ever made, to me to-day, for God Himself knows that I am speaking the truth. And another thing, a confession—you will despise me for it very probably, but I want you to know every thought of my mind: I tried to avoid caring for you before you told me to; it was for my own sake! I have always ridiculed poor men marrying, even men who were getting on. I have cried 'On what?' When I have

heard of a young man's triumph in any profession—a clever picture, a book that has been well reviewed—I have always asked, ‘Is he married?’ and if the answer was ‘yes,’ I have . . . pitied him! I doubted whether I should be willing to handicap myself in my struggle for success by asking you to be my wife, even if I had a small income to do it on. Oh! my dearest, how could I have doubted; how? ‘My wife,’ I could go in rags for you! I wouldn’t long for fame unless you longed for your husband to be famous. I wouldn’t wish for riches, if you only wished for comfort. I should have no ambition and no desire throughout existence but the desire to make you happy, and the ambition to be worthier of your love! Violet, I would work to win you as no man ever worked to win a girl before. Give me the vaguest hope, and I will tell you exactly how

I stand ; every difficulty in the way shall be made clear to you. Am I to have nothing to look forward to but to forget you ? Our introduction might be the turning-point in my career ; it might be a Heaven-sent blessing ! If you are human, if you have any compassion, any tenderness, if you have the heart of a woman in your breast, don't, in mercy's name, my darling, don't let it be my curse."

"What can I answer ?" she demanded, desperately, "what can I answer if you won't understand ? It isn't that I object to love you—merely that the love is not here ! Can I force it to come in order to save you misery ? If I can, say so, and I will do it. You could not 'sham to me,' would you have me sham to you ? Shall I give you dross for gold, accept your love, and flirt with you in return ? Don't tempt me to sully the

memory of our friendship by such a paltry act, because I won't! If this love is sent to me I will not fight against it, I will welcome it."

"Vi!"

"Yes, you may think little of a girl for owning it, but you wring the admission from me by your pain. I will welcome it gladly, to spare you suffering, and to spare suffering to myself. Your poverty is no terror to me; if you believe it is, you do me an injustice."

"You would share discomfort, hardships, for my sake?"

"If I loved you," she said, "I would share starvation!"

"Oh, my good angel," he murmured, brokenly; "oh, my Ideal."

There was a mist before his eyes and he trembled. In imagination he had already

won her, and was achieving great things to reap the harvest of her praise.

“Violet,” he said, “there is another obstacle between us besides the poverty ; you must know everything now.”

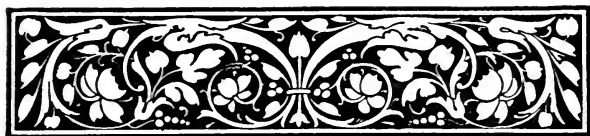
“Besides ?” she asked, “besides your position, my . . . my want of love ?”

“Yes,” he replied, huskily, “a third ! Stop for a minute, will you, don’t walk on. I want to tell you, I . . . stand here.”

“Some other time will do,” she suggested, “surely ?”

“No, no other time,” he said, with a gulp ; . . . “I am a Jew !”





CHAPTER V.

THEY were leaning over the Suspension Bridge with their faces to the livelier section of the river. It was very near the end of October, an anomaly of an October, upon which Chester residents dilated long afterwards, for whilst the earliest days of the month had been cold and cheerless, fulfilling the menace of a raw September and a showery August, towards the close of the first week King Sol had suddenly condescended to blaze with the greater vigour for his tardiness, and sunshades had once more been called into

requisition, and the streets were full of good looking young fellows in flannels, and people were saying it seemed as if we were rapidly acquiring the climate of the antipodes.

Below, to their left, the boats were drawn up upon the bank beneath the trees, and on the Dee itself there were more boats, with here and there a crimson parasol dotting the perspective, and now and again among the gliding couples and the laughing parties, a pretty woman came by paddling a canoe. They watched it all dreamily for a moment or two in silence; somehow the light and colour of the scene appeared incongruous; then:

“Was this quite fair?” she said.

“It makes me look very culpable, I know,” he returned, gloomily; “but if you had given me a different answer that day,

I meant to have told you all at once. You don't doubt that, do you? It was because you said you didn't care for me, and that we were merely friends, that there did not seem to be any necessity."

"There was . . . before," she reminded him.

"I have never acted to deceive you, I swear I haven't! If the conversation had ever turned upon religion, I would have declared what mine was without hesitating an instant; it never did. You wouldn't have me go about advertising my faith with a board round my neck as if I were blind! . . . Perhaps you consider I am! . . . Miss Dyas!"

"What is it?" she faltered. She felt fearfully wretched; it struck her that he was standing there beside her like a prisoner in the presence of his judge, and every

instance of her power over him was a fresh pang to her, since she did not desire any tribute to her sovereignty which implied pain to the subject. Had the love been mutual she would have wanted her power to be greater still; but that she did not know.

“Miss Dyas, I have gone with you to hear beautiful music and clever sermons, but I have been in churches over and over again before I ever met you. I went to this very Cathedral for the first time alone; it was the Sunday after I came down here . . . Do you think I have been guilty of—what shall I call it—‘tacit deceit’ in ignoring my own Sabbath? Well, I have ignored it no more here than anywhere else. I write on Saturdays; we are not supposed to write. I have not kept the Sabbath rigidly at any period! my people

never did. Since I was born I do not suppose I have been in a Synagogue a dozen times. I have said my prayers at home Saturday and Sunday, and every other day, and I have tried to be good. Besides," he went on, "I won't deny it, there is a difficulty about admitting oneself a Jew. It sounds very cowardly to say so, but one is always afraid the genial faces will harden, and the cheery smiles grow chilly, and fade away—we have seen it so often. You Christians aver that your prejudice against us has grown less; we Jews endeavour to persuade ourselves it has, but it is all rubbish: you are as bitter as ever. There is more than a joke in the anecdote of the sailor who indignantly knocked down a Jewish pedlar in the East India Road because 'you Jews crucified my Saviour,' and explained that he had 'only heard about

it yesterday.' How can we help feeling a reluctance to cry, 'We are Jews!' when you never forgive? The very name is ugly, too; 'Christian,' 'Catholic,' 'Mahommedan,' even, they have a touch of music, they are at least euphonious, but 'Jew,' it is a jerk, the word itself sounds like a gibe . . . Are you ever going to say anything? . . . Am I a heathen in your eyes?"

"'A heathen?'" she murmured.
"Surely, 'to be good' is the most!"

"Violet," he exclaimed, eagerly, "is this obstacle going to be the end of everything, or will you still welcome the love if it comes? My dear one, are not the sects and distinctions of religion accidents of birth? We are what our fathers and mothers have been before us; we are not consulted as to our choice of a religion as we are in the selection of our career. If

you had been born of Jewish parents, do you imagine you would have become a Protestant from conviction? Yours appears the one faith to you because you have been brought up in it; if you had been brought up to say your prayers to Bûddha, Bûddhism would have appeared the one faith. Oh, my darling, my darling! think what we have still in common: our notions of right and wrong are the same, dear, our hopes of heaven are the same, our God is the same! Is all this too little to make a bond between a man's and a woman's life? Is the story of the creation, the history of His earliest word to man insufficient for you and me to hold and believe together? or does it need *two* books to hallow a union upon earth, though in the union of eternity all creeds are equal?"

"I am not unkind," she said, earnestly,

“don’t imagine I am unkind; you astonished me, that was all. *My* face has not hardened, has it? *I* haven’t turned away?”

“No, indeed,” he replied; “you are always gentler to me than I deserve.”

There was a nursemaid crossing the bridge with her charges, coming from the park, and the hoop belonging to one of them, escaping control, rolled in among the folds of Violet’s dress. Allan picked it up, and restoring it to the stolidly expectant child with a forced smile, came back to her side, a trifle closer than before.

“It will make no difference between us?” he questioned.

“I do not know—I mean, I am not sure. But, at least, I thank you for your confidence.”

“What will *she* say?” he asked. He referred to Mrs. Carroll.

“That is what I am wondering; you do not mind my telling her?”

“Oh, no; she knows what has taken place, of course?”

The girl nodded.

“And she is sorry, naturally?”

“Yes, she is sorry; not . . . Ah, don’t think she objects simply because you are not rich. She is sorry because the change has brought a grief to us.”

“But why should it bring a grief,” he said, wistfully, “if your feelings alter, too? I do not beg for much; I do not want you to be engaged to me as I am now—a beggar! You are not eighteen: under any circumstances you would hardly be engaged until you were twenty. If the love is born give me a year’s grace, wait

till you are twenty-one? Let me have three years to get on in, and if at the end of that time I can come to you and her and say, 'These are my prospects,' and you both deem them sufficiently fair, promise to be my wife then. In the meanwhile you would be as free as air, I only should be pledged to you. I can't make a fortune in three years; I'm not such a fool as to suppose I can. But I may make a considerable stride, and even if our engagement lasted another two, you would still be under twenty-three when we married. 'When we married,'—oh, my heart's heart! I would take you as a gift from God . . . *'When we married!'* "

"Don't!" she whispered, thrilling. "Oh, what do you see in me to care for me like this?"

"You don't know how I do care for

you—you never will! Even if you were my wife, my cherished, worshipped wife, with me day after day, sympathizing and sympathized with—if we were together till we died, you and I, there would always be one secret from you: you would never realize how dear you were to me! I could find no language to express it to you, and my life would be too short to witness the eternity of my love!”

Her hand was resting on the rail, and he covered it for an instant with his own. She drew it away. In his *exalté* condition the prohibition appeared needlessly cruel, and again a little silence fell between them, which was broken by her.

“Let us go on,” she said, “it is getting late.”

“You will remember this morning’s conversation, Violet?”

Would she remember it? The big, stupid, adoring boy! Had he not been stripping the last vestige of her childishness from her by his every sentence, completing her education with every sigh, and teaching her the magic of her womanhood each time their eyes met? Would she remember it!

“And I shall pray for this tenderness to come to you, and that I may be made worthier of such a blessing if it does! Should the prayer be answered, well, then you will lend me some of your own patience to be brave with, will you not? because, you see, mine may be nearly exhausted—only my love will be always the same, no probation in the world can ever exhaust that! And by-and-by, who knows? my misery and your indifference may belong to the past, and we shall look back at

them with a jest, and laugh at the recollection together."

Oh the music of those words "Always" and "Together" when one loves! the Heavenly melody that finds its echo in the soul! and every syllable a wedding chime!

"Ours could not be such a house as you ought to have right off," he continued; "we should have to win the luxury later. Indeed, there might be only two or three rooms just at first; still, they should be pretty and quaintly-shaped — Chelsea way, perhaps, with a tree showing from the window. But you would stay in town beforehand with Mrs. Carroll, and in the cool of the day we would visit the pleasantest suburbs; and while we strolled and talked, you and I would choose the quarter that should be our home. . . . And

we would have a piano; we might have to hire the piano at the beginning, but it should be a good one, and we should forget it was not our own. And we would have a few water-colours, and a screen, and some china; and in the twilight, when the shadows were creeping in with the scent of the flowers, you would sing to me . . . and, oh, my beloved! I would write great books, that you might be proud of me; and you would write, too, if you were my wife; and in the evenings we would read our work aloud and help each other."

He had gone on speaking rather to himself than to her, shaping his vision into broken phrases; and she listened apathetically, his enthusiasm totally unshared. He already saw the branches of the imaginary tree swaying in accompaniment to her song, heard the rustle of the leaves

trembling on the stillness of the summer nights while she lay pouring her love out in his arms. She hurried towards the haven of Powis Lodge as ignorant of passion as a Galatea in the marble, wishing she had been walking with her aunt instead.

He bade her good-bye, and sought his lodgings, intoxicated by the fancied future whose brightness tinged the present and dispelled its cares. There was no mother in his reverie now; previously, as though she had stood with outstretched hands upon the mountain of the difficulties in his path, she had been visible through all, the highest duty and the summit of ambition. The girl who did not care for him had displaced her; and this is the manner of youth which is as selfish as old age, although it owns more generous

impulses. How we boast in the college period of the things we intend to do for our "people" when "business begins to go!" the boxes at the theatre, and the preparatory little dinners we will give them as soon as the briefs come in; the *porte bonheur* we will buy for "mother" when Chrysos purchases our first picture; and the cigars—we will show him what cigars can be—which shall be sent in a case that blocks the hall, to the dear old governor, if we only do as well as a broker in the first six months as we expect! And we mean it, too, whether our munificence is to be fulfilled from Fitzroy Square, Garden Court, or only from Throgmorton Street. And then one fine day—just about the stage when we are beginning to keep ourselves without the "dear old governor's" cheques—a young woman comes along, and

her eyelashes have a heavenward tendency, and her lips look so soft we want to kiss them. So the parents who have watched over us from our birth, and paid for the education which assists us to make love to her effectively, go to the wall in favour of a stranger who has done nothing for us at all, and who probably has no inclination that way either; and the *porte bonheur* adorns the young woman's wrist, not mother's; and the boxes for the theatre go to *her* mother, not our own; and that very substantial sum designed for cigars eventually settles a Piccadilly florist's bill, being expended throughout the season in lilies and poinsettias to bring a light pleasurable to see under the eyelashes which turn up. But had our people, who foresaw all this, hinted at such a contingency earlier, while we were still

bragging about our liberal intentions, we should have been much hurt, indeed, and lamented the defect in their dispositions which prevented them from being grateful in anticipation.

Allan was temporarily happy, and Violet told her aunt he was a Jew—a tardy announcement on his part, which surprised the widow not a little, and made him appear more culpable in her estimation than in the girl's, whereas the avowal of his feelings had contrariwise seemed to her of less importance than it did to Vi.

Before they saw him again, however, a certain event had banished the thought of his concealment from the minds of both; the event was a trouble, and it was brought by the postman, who in the course of the year brings us the majority of our troubles—which is the only adducible explanation

of his theory that he is entitled to a Christmas-box at the end of it. The epistle was addressed to Mrs. Carroll; it was short, and it ran thus :—

“BROOKLYN, U.S.A.

“DEAR BERTHA,

“I cannot swear whether you or I wrote last, but neither of us is offended, eh? I have quite decided to return to Europe, and shall, of course, see you and the child on my arrival. I shall start soon. How is she? In that photo I thought she resembled poor Nellie very much, but photos are such frauds! I want her to come and live with me; I shall most likely open a business in London, and we shall be company for one another. I suppose you will be a trifle cut up at parting from her, but Chester is not a thousand miles from town, and it will not really make

much difference, excepting that I shall not be lonely. The change, too, should be a good thing for her at her age, and, indeed, the only sufferer by the arrangement, so far as I can see, will be yourself, unless (and this seems probable) a young girl frisking about the place is rather a nuisance to you at times, in which case my suggestion is positively brilliant for all three. Am not able to state definitely by what boat I leave, but let her get ready as soon as you like. I cannot write sentiment, because I am always afraid it will look as if it had been cribbed from a novel, but I am anxious to have her with me : she is my daughter, your sister Nellie's baby ; need I say any more ? Excuse haste, I have only ten minutes to save the mail.

“Yours affectionately,

“ ROBERT.”

“Auntie!”

“Little Vi!”

Then they stared at one another dumbly; it was as if a bombshell had been deposited between them, and the roses of the carpet and the frames upon the walls swam before “Nellie’s baby” in dizzying confusion.

“Give it to me!” she said under her breath.

She read the letter slowly through, and, mechanically folding it, restored it to its envelope without a word.

“Little Vi!” exclaimed Mrs. Carroll again. She held out her arms, and the girl crept to them, and laid her head upon her breast.

“*Have* I been a ‘nuisance to you,’ auntie?”

“Oh, my darling, hush! A ‘nuisance,’ you!”

So they sat quite mute for minutes, rocking to and fro, contemplating the parting that was to come.

“He is your father, darling,” the widow murmured at length, surreptitiously drying the tears she had been powerless to force back, “and he loves you, too; you mustn’t cry!”

“My tears are all here, in my throat, dear,” said the girl; “it is you who are crying!”

“Is it? I am a very silly woman then, for there is nothing to cry at, you know, nothing at all; as he says, it will not actually make much difference!”

“Oh, no, not much difference, really not much difference; I shall see you once in three months instead of all day, only that! And I shall sit in a hat and jacket when I come, and you will offer me the easiest chair

like a visitor, and ask me if I'll take a glass of w—w—wine!"

"Violet!"

"Yes, that will be it! At first we shall have so much to tell each other that we shall both want to talk at once, but by degrees we shall stiffen; a strange servant will open the door to me, and ask 'What name?' and you will admire my new check to make conversation, and it will be an ordeal to you, my coming, an ordeal!"

She broke into an hysterical laugh that was worse to hear than a sob.

"The strange servant will be the last straw," she said, trying to smile naturally; "and if she does ask who I am, I shall faint!"

"Aggie will still be here, she will stop with us always . . . with *me*, I mean!" said the widow, correcting herself feebly.

“With ‘*you*,’ ah, yes, we can’t say with ‘us’ any more, can we? And she won’t stop, I know she won’t. Aggie wants to marry the butcher, it is hateful of her; auntie, you will have to forbid the banns!”

“I am going to give you a glass of wine now, before you are a visitor,” declared her aunt rising; “pull down the middle blind, this glare is horrible!”

She rang the bell, and they sipped a glass of sherry apiece with attempted cheerfulness, and made little choky jests about “flying to drink.”

“I ought to love him, and I don’t, that’s what is hurting me so,” Violet said with a gasp; “he’ll expect me to hug him, and how can I feel like hugging a man I haven’t seen since I was ten!”

“‘A man,’ sweetheart, he is your father!” Mrs. Carroll repeated.

“Well he *is* a man, isn’t he? I suppose you’ll introduce us . . . ‘Allow me: Mr. Dyas, Miss Dyas, your daughter!’ And I shall bow so, no, without the glass of sherry, and he will say he is ‘delighted,’ or ask for the ‘next valse,’ or . . . oh, this stuff is going to my head, auntie, I am getting stupid!”

“You will soon learn to know him; your mother loved him dearly, and you ought to grow fonder of him than you are of me!”

“Don’t,” Violet cried, “don’t say that, or you will make it all worse still; you are the first, always the first to me! Dearest, is it a fact that I am like her?”

“Your poor mother was fair, but there is a resemblance, I think, something about the mouth; your face, though, is stronger than hers was.”

“And everything is in my face!” she

responded, unconsciously quoting. "Where is the will I fancied I possessed? Could any girl be a greater coward than I am now! No, I will *not* give way like this; there are several weeks yet, and they shall be peaceful ones; we will put the thought of our separation aside!"

"I should like to go down and see Mr. Finlason, if you don't mind being left alone for half-an-hour," Mrs. Carroll suggested; "or would you rather we sent a message asking him to call round in the evening?"

"No, dear, go now if you wish, I shan't be dull; and when you come back we'll have one of our cosy afternoons just as if nothing had happened. Don't ring again, I'll fetch your things for you, and button your boots, . . . I shan't be able to do it much longer, you know!" she added, brightly.

But when she had closed the front door,

the feigned composure vanished. She might have been physically tired, so weakly did she drag herself back through the passage, and sink into her seat once more. She was enduring the greatest blow that had fallen on her since the morning she had stood a child of eight behind the nursery window of the silent house in Russell Square, and watched a funeral cortege drearily winding its way around the green enclosure in which she had played "while mother lived," only a week ago.

It has been said elsewhere, she was already more self-reliant than Allan, and this was precisely the reason why his love was powerless to subdue her, but for "already" read "as yet," and the disparity is understood. When a girl has a strong character, her strength is generally more manifest than a young man's of correspond-

ing age, for while he in his buffets with the world has his confidence shaken, and his vanity diminished, she, tilting at windmills only, and sheltered by a home, is liable to over-estimate her hardihood, since she is not confronted with so many opportunities for having it tested. Had Allan remained in the luxury to which he was born, or had he at length attained success by his own efforts, her feeling for him would have been different, not from any mercenary considerations, but simply because in prosperity he would have been less subject to fits of despondence, a species of weakness which in her lover often attracts a courageous woman, but invariably repels a brave girl, to whom the ideal wooer is never her slave but her master. Again, strong as she was if her situation had been similar to his own, she would have insensibly turned to

him for encouragement, and speedily discovered, not merely that she was not quite so independent as she was apt to deem herself, but that a man may be prone to his gusts of self-depreciation, and still be capable of sustaining a girl whom circumstances have never caused to doubt herself at all.

Studying to please her as he was, Allan had perceived that the more resolution he contrived to simulate the more chance of dominating her he possessed, but he had averred a fact—he could not act to her. Such a method seemed so pitiably below its object. He might in one remark pretend to regard the goal of fame towards which he was working as assuredly within his reach—he might vow where there was a will there was a way, and positively assert, in her own words, that any man could carve his own

career if he had only sufficient determination; but in his next sentence he would contradict himself, and unwittingly appeal to her for support, and then the ground he had gained would be lost. Indeed, at this period he was yearning for sympathy most desperately. His life was a very lonely one, and what he wanted was to be able to speak the truth to her when he was depressed, and be understood; whereas, if he had been an egotist, and talked about the laurel wreath of immortality as if it had been growing in the backyard, and all he had to do was to go out and put it on, she, clear-sighted enough to have ridiculed such conceit as it deserved in a woman, would, in a man, have found it admirable, and, allowing for her temperament and inexperience, might have been subjected and, very possibly, won. In his castles in the air he customarily saw him-

self leaning his head upon her shoulder, and confiding his disappointments in her ear. The fanciful position typified his mental attitude, and it is not the lover who kneels at her feet and kisses her finger-tips who storms the heart of such a girl, but the suitor who takes her boldly in his arms and salutes her on the lips.

While she was still brooding over the farewell that was in store, Allan was announced.

It was no coincidence that he had arrived when she was alone. He had noticed Mrs. Carroll in St. John Street and known she was out before he inquired for her. Her absence from the house had shown him his chance of securing a *tête-à-tête* with Violet, and—well, he was in love!

As he came over to her, she lifted her mournful face and welcomed him more

gently than she had been wont to do of late. With that singleness of idea which pertains to the boyish adorer, he immediately attributed the woe upon her features to her meditation on his own pain.

“What is the matter?” he asked.

“I am in trouble,” she said. “Aunt Bertha has gone to Mr. Finlason’s office; sit down, she won’t be long.”

“What is the trouble about, not . . . may I know?”

He had been going to say “Not me?” but substituted another query instead.

“I am going away,” she answered, stonily; “I am going to live in London with my father.”

The colour ebbed from his cheeks, and he gripped the velvet of the chair. He gripped the velvet because a sudden tremor tingled upward from his wrists so that he

ached to take hold of *her*. She was going to London to be guarded by this father whom he had never met. What likelihood could there be of him seeing her henceforward? London sounded as bad as Hong Kong!

“I am so sorry,” he said in a strained voice; “it will be a sad leave-taking for you.”

The clock ticked with phenomenal loudness, it might have been a locomotive in the room. When one of her own sex longs to comfort a woman, and the phrases are hard to find, she caresses her; a man who is neither her relation nor her *fiancé* cannot do this, so he watches her awkwardly, thinking he looks unfeeling, and suffers too.

She was standing on the hearthrug, and Allan got up and leant against the mantelpiece beside her, she had seemed such a

long way off from where he had been sitting. As his arm hung, his fingers just brushed the folds of her skirt, and he lingered over the contact as if it had been a caress, yet touching the gown furtively and softly, for fear she should detect his foolishness and move.

“I am so unhappy,” she murmured, with the instinctive submission in her tone a girl always adopts when she is in distress to a man who is fond of her, whether she is tender to him as a rule, or not; “the letter came just now; he will be in England soon, and then it will be ‘good-bye’; and, oh! I ought not to grieve when he is my father. Don’t blame me for it, but I can’t help it, I can’t, indeed; I shall never, never, see Aunt Bertha properly any more!”

“‘Blame you for it,’ *Vi!*”

It was a cry rather than a response. He made an ungovernable gesture that would have appeared dramatic if it had not been so clumsily natural, and his compassion stirred her blood, and bore his misery in upon her as his supplication had never done. She snatched his hand as it fell and covered it with both her own.

“Don’t,” she whispered, “don’t give way through me!”

At that moment the love was in her breast, the woman was awake in her, and for perhaps ten seconds they stood looking into each other’s eyes, their two hearts beating as if they would break. She was as pale as he, and he was white as death. Their hands clung together in a clasp neither had known before, and their gaze was fixed as though they sought to penetrate the workings of each other’s

brain. The permission that had leapt into her look—the new, the heavenly meaning in the dark wide-opened eyes that glowed into his till her pupils seemed to distend and dazzle him, bewildered the boy so that he wondered breathlessly and could not speak. Every pulse beat “Kiss her! kiss her!” There was a singing as of the ocean in his ears. If, instead of wrestling against the temptation, he had caught her to him as he craved to do—if he had crushed her mouth to his in such a kiss as must have been the outcome of their emotion then, in another instant, she would have been sobbing her soul out on his neck. He did not because he was a fool. He forbore because he knew her agony of mind, and was far too truly fond of her to risk misreading and making it worse. She drew herself apart from him, and the opportunity was over. She felt a

blank, a sense of something wanting. He sustained himself by the erroneous reflection that her mood would be the same to-morrow or in a week. Too much delicacy is sometimes a mistake.

There are occasions when a man may curse himself more terribly than he curses the liar who has defamed him—the thief who has defrauded him—or the villain who has despoiled his home; and for many and many a day, remembering when happiness seemed within his reach, Allan Morris cursed the consideration which prevented his plucking it at the danger of mistaking the feeling and doubling the desolation of the girl he loved.



CHAPTER VI.

MRS. CARROLL was in a dilemma, and if the intimacy between Violet and Allan might not have been expected to be brought to a termination at any week now by the girl's departure, there is little doubt but what she would have extricated herself from it by an immediate "No."

Mr. Morris had invited the widow and her niece to tea.

Perhaps it was her knowledge that the cordiality with which she had been used to treat him had suffered some diminution of late which spared him the mortification of

a definite refusal, for his earnest petition had struck her as implying she had made the boy feel himself indebted for her hospitality, and stung him into an effort to return it. Perhaps, too, Violet's evident delight at the notion had something to do with it; anyhow, she said she would "think about it," and the uncertainty ended in a genuine acceptance.

That Violet should be unfeignedly pleased was by no means the compliment to him which Allan was inclined to hold it. She liked him as she had always done, but that spark of love which he had omitted to kindle into a blaze had never returned, nor, indeed, had she so much as admitted to herself that it had once come. In self-communion she would have averred there had been "something" in her heart that afternoon, but what it was she did not

know, and declared, moreover, that if he had embraced her her whole soul would have cried out it was a wrong. To the majority of women this description will sound absurd and unnatural, but if there is any subject of which women might be reasonably supposed to have a fair acquaintance and are profoundly ignorant, that subject is young girls; they might have been boys twelve years ago so absolutely have they forgotten at thirty those inexplicable contradictions of their minds which made them enigmas to us when they were eighteen. It may surprise them also to be informed that they are much easier to be won in the beauty of womanhood than in the charm of extreme youth. Not many men find this out either; possibly because few men fall in love with very young girls, yet the explanation is quite simple: the

longer a woman lives, the greater knowledge of men she derives; insensibly she begins to think more as we think, our companionship colours her ideas, her philosophy is an adaptation of our own cynicism, and we consequently understand her better. But a girl, wayward, unpractical, in her teens, is as God made her, and to this riddle we have no key.

Violet would go with her aunt to the lodgings of the suitor she had "rejected"—if his avowal could be termed an "offer"—and she would be neither deliberately encouraging him nor retracting the assertion he was only her friend; and you, *mesdames*, would have acted just as "remarkably" (as it seems to you now) if you had been in the guardianship of a relative equally unworldly, and thought no harm of it either. Of the trio, the only one who

failed to comprehend the motive exactly was, of course, the man. Mrs. Carroll, who would not willingly have hurt the feelings of a cannibal, was aware she had been brought to consent partly because she was conscious she had wounded him, and chiefly because it no longer much mattered. Violet, who had no misgivings as to the propriety, looked forward to the visit—firstly, because in depression one welcomes any novelty; and, secondly, because in the tenderness with which one quits a city which has been one's home, every attendant circumstance on the farewell is grateful, and doubly so when connected with somebody whom in one's period of happiness one has grown accustomed to associate with it.

Never had his lodgings worn a more poverty-ridden aspect to the young man

than during the days which intervened between that besought-for promise and its fulfilment; never had the dilapidated rep appeared to shriek so loudly for the upholsterer's aid, nor the red and the white curtain, hanging stiffly from each window, irritated him as more abominably odd. And yet—though this was a personal compensation, since the subsequent condition of the apartment would not in the slightest detract from the view presented to *her*—it seemed to him it could never be dismal again, must be beautiful and glorified indeed, for “She” would have been in it. There is one taste the scientist has in common with the *flâneur*; the gentleman shares it with “Alf” and “Bill:” it is to see the girl he wants to marry under the roof that shelters himself. No matter whether the roof covers a Park Lane

residence or a couple of furnished rooms leased at a weekly rental of eight shillings; never mind whether he greets her in the *salon* or the basement; immaterial whether the refreshment he sets before her is the masterpiece of a *chef*, the cup that cheers but not inebriates, or the flowing porter and the savoury cheese with which 'Arry does honour "Jine." The taste is an ingrained instinct in us all, and when she takes off her hat we thrill.

Would not the hopelessly shabby furniture be eloquent of Violet in the future? Would not her soft hair have rested against an antimacassar, which would be henceforth hallowed, never to know the sacrilege of the wash-tub if he could prevent it—a whim his landlady was not likely to dispute. Why, the walls, the tablecloth, the whole

place would speak her name ; and could he not always look at the chair she had occupied, and picture her in her last attitude still, in fancy re-live the afternoon till the memory of it brightened every other afternoon that was to come ? As a child who at night obliterates the record of the latest date which has elapsed to accelerate the advent of dear Santa Claus, so did this young man who had been ten years older than his age until love dispelled the premature sedateness, inwardly exclaim a hundred times a day, " Violet, Violet, Violet is coming to tea ! " Then, because at a corresponding stage of his career every man of imagination does it, just as inevitably if his feeling is serious as if the attraction is a passing one, he wrote poetry. His poetry was very bad, it was in truth not poetry at all. He had been informed

of this, and like many more popular authors with talent for fiction, would sooner have been able to turn out pretty verses than great novels. He composed eight lines, which at first satisfied him as a prelude to the climax that floated vaguely through his brain, and entitled it:

ONE DAY IN CHESTER.

On Chester's Wishing Steps we loiter —
Linger as the sun goes down —
Where folk-lore vows no wish is idle,
Poet's wreath, or sov'reign's crown ;
On Wishing Steps beside the river,
Stones the lapping waters lave,
You smiling turn with gay reminder,
Jesting, ask me what I'd have.——

Here, however, the muse forsook him, taking flight at the unpleasant remembrance that the Wishing Steps were *not* "beside the river," and the "lapping waters" failed to realize the course described, because there

did not happen to be any water in the vicinity. He therefore tore the effort up, and essayed a more passionate effusion:—

Oh, Love, my Love, I want your soul,
And not your friendship ; want the whole
Of that great heart of which I own
A corner that but comes as stone
Instead of bread to one who hungers for it all.
I want . . .

He came to a full-stop again ; in point of fact, he was not quite sure that he knew what he did want, if his requirements had to be expressed in rhyme ; and, by the way, if none of us could form a desire without the achievement of rendering it into decent verse, what a vastly more contented population the world's would be.

But farcical as such incidents always seem when unconnected with ourselves, it must not be forgotten that the border-line dividing the sublime from the ridiculous

is very thin, nor is there probably any subject so fully capable as this same Love of being treated humorously, or *au grand sérieux*, according to the bent of the narrator. We were convulsed with mirth—at least some people were—at the intensely human tragedy of “Faust,” when it was burlesqued at the “Gaiety,” and behind the footlights the situations and social positions of the characters were changed; in print, the precise story which has impelled our tears when recounted in one fashion, might, by the simple device of bringing the comic side into prominence be told so as to make us laugh instead, and without altering a single occurrence. For invariably the comic side is there, only sometimes it is hidden deftly in the shadow of the picture, and at others arrests attention in the foreground.

To Allan's perception, this period of probation had no light comedy, it was often well-nigh unendurable, hence his ludicrous, yet pathetic anticipation of the visit. Occasionally when, as he had said, he dreaded that the visionary scenes, wherein the joy he hankered after was his at last, that the mental conversations in which he indulged till their deleterious sweetness fired him as if it had been real, would, if continued, affect his reason, he tried to calm himself by reading one of the tattered novels he found lying about the premises. But novels aggravated rather than interested him now: the obstacles between Edwin and Angelina never met his own case, which was, scarcely surprising, seeing that it is the misfortune of few men to be handicapped at once by religion, such absolute poverty

and indifference on the part of the girl who fills their thoughts. Nevertheless the income of five hundred a year which was insufficient for the "younger son," and the long-standing engagement to his cousin, which tied the tongue of "the heir," annoyed him, and he flung the history of their woes aside. Judging by the interminable procession of five-hundred-per-annum heroes who marched through volumes, dependent for advancement upon bachelor uncles, one would think that no man with less than five hundred a year had ever fallen in love before! Once he did encounter variety; it was a short tale by John Strange Winter, and yearning to see something of his own predicament related, it appeared to him midway the cleverest he had read: they could not get married, the sweet-hearts of this sketch, because the man was

too hard up even to pay his bootmaker. Thrice blest John Strange Winter! After being so delightfully true to life what possessed you to be still truer; why, oh why did you let the gentlemanly beggar with whom Allan identified himself at the beginning marry another woman for her money at the end?

The "Society Echo" in its *feuilletons* was now the antithesis of the conventionality which exasperated him elsewhere. His original instructions had been to eschew commoners whenever convenient and to be lavish of his peers, for the "Society Echo" circulated in the Society that, although it never meets one, "dearly loves a lord;" but, latterly, he was disregarding the editor's mandate with a dogged persistence which, had his "copy" been less full of literary merit than it was, would have assuredly

procured him his dismissal. His heroes, in three numbers out of four, were authors starving in garrets; his heroines inevitably had fair brown hair, which curled naturally about their shoulders; and if once a month he did vouchsafe to introduce a suitor with a title, the bankrupt and luckless personage was in such abject straits as would have gladdened the readers of "Reynolds'" to the core.

On the Wednesday destined for the Great Event, Mr. Morris rose with an unaccustomed sense of exhilaration. He ate his breakfast hurriedly, and requested the dishevelled child who took away the tray, to inform her mother he would feel favoured if she "stepped upstairs"; the tardy sample of a summer was long since over, and previous experience on the point had given him misgivings anent the fire.

Mrs. Shaper was a withered little woman, with a watery smile and a chronic deafness. She spoke in a subdued voice, and had an apparently inexhaustible family of diminutive and dirty daughters all the same size, who had inherited in equal shares the parent's vacant look. She herself was seldom visible, but her lodger's meals were laid in instalments by a selection of the offsprings, who after the meat had been uncovered made their appearance separately, and at lengthy intervals bearing the knife, and the fork, and the plate. Those of the Chester folk who are in search of "Comfortable Apartments at most Moderate Terms" will regret to learn Mrs. Shaper is no longer among the attractions of their dear old city, but she has removed to another cathedral town, where she may be found letting lodgings to which the

description of Allan's correspond. She entered presently, and stood by the door, an elbow supported by her right palm, and her left hand held to her mouth, as if she deemed the female mouth a portion of anatomy it would be indelicate to expose.

"Mrs. Shaper," he said, and his tone was important, for this was no matter to be lightly discussed, "I have two ladies coming here to tea this afternoon; will you see that there is a clean cloth, please, and that the coal-scuttle is filled—with lumps! And you might set the table yourself, if you will, instead of leaving it to the children? I am going out, and I will order in a cake and some biscuits and things, and all I shall ask you to do will be to toast the muffins. Oh, and Mrs. Shaper, I shall be bringing in some

flowers, will you wash a few of the . . . the ornaments to hold them?"

She came nearer to him and looked perplexed.

"Yes, well?" he remarked encouragingly, "what is it? what is the trouble?"

"I thought," she murmured meekly, "I understood from Mariar that there was something you wished to say to me?"

It was then borne in upon him that not a syllable of his instructions had reached her, and she was still waiting for him to begin. He, therefore, repeated the directions, and when the partial intelligence with which she had been endowed had ascended to an adequate height she withdrew, and he was able to meditate in undisturbed reflection what the "things" he had vaguely expressed an intention of ordering had better be.

Excepting the watering-places and two or three others, a man may live in the country on a guinea a week with a facility which in London would recall a miracle extraordinary for the expansive properties of certain loaves and fishes. He will not be a voluptuary, but he may fare both decently and sufficiently, and not leave himself without silver after defraying the bill.

Allan had amassed eight or nine shillings to expend in the entertainment of her whom he "delighted to honour." It was a drawback that the prospect of this unwonted outlay all at once should intensify the recollection that his position was scarcely such as justified his hope of becoming a husband and father.

Why was he not rich? He would have written to Duclos, and Charbonnel, and Covent Garden, to render his queen's recep-

tion worthy of her—Chester would have boasted nothing good enough! He would have purchased a *Sèvres* service—that the cup, at least, might be fit to touch her lips if he were not! Oh, why was he not rich? how differently he would plead! No, “I would,” and “I should like,” but “I will,” and “I can do!” And it is surprising how much more valuable the indicative mood is to love speeches than the subjunctive. He would win her were he prosperous, he was assured of it. She would not sell herself for the wealth of Cræsus, but in prosperity he could evince his sincerity by a thousand actions, while, as a beggar, he could only depend upon a million words.

Money cannot buy love? No, but it can prove it! and a love thoroughly comprehended is three parts returned. Moralists and idiots would have us sneer at the

potentialities of gold; it cannot buy health either, they dogmatically declare — these philosophers in a feather-bed—and “no, indeed,” we piously concur, “of course it can’t.” Yet, when we see some tiny cripple shifting his twisted limbs in torture for lack of the proper appliances to give him ease; see the poor stricken by disease in a foetid alley and subsisting on cold tea and hard bread in cases where you and yours would try old port and the south of France, until they die less of their sickness than their penury, it looks uncommonly as if it could.

It cannot buy happiness? True again, most reverend seigniors; one cannot go into Mr. Whiteley’s emporium and be served with a pound’s worth of happiness at any counter in his establishment! Nor can an income in five figures bring back the hand-clasp of Charlie, whom those black devils

shot "out there." It cannot restore to us her "voice that is still," with its human music hushed for ever under the broken column and yesterday's roses in God's Acre. But if we are artists, it can spare us the indignity of prostituting our art to the exigencies of want, allow us to devote the gift that Heaven has granted us to highest work, and save us the agony of "pot-boiling." If we are bibliomaniacs, it can procure us rare editions; if we are fond of our "people," it can brighten all their homes; and if we chance to be philanthropically inclined, it can invest us with a well-nigh unlimited power for doing good.

It cannot buy purity of thought? It cannot transform a sensualist into a Saint Anthony! But what about the slums where mother and sons, and brothers and sisters,

herd like pigs between the walls of one cellar, cursing together, undressing together, and shivering together, till girls to whom such terms as "modesty" and "corruption" are meaningless, grow old enough to seek a nearer approach to refinement in the streets. Money, do not disparage it, for not merely does it purchase comfort, but, alas, so sovereign is its sway, that virtue and honesty may be bought as well.

Some day a new songster will arise, and he will chant the fame of Money. With the fervour of a Swinburne will he sing its praises, and before this great man all the world will bow down and listen. How vast will be his scope, how justified his hyperbole of adoration, since to the acquisition of what desideratum upon earth can we assert his mistress may not be instrumental, unless it is to procure for the ugly ones amongst us

another cast of countenance? And then—oh, mighty money—it can buy us beauty, too—the beauty of somebody else!

Glancing around, Allan decided in detail what improvements might be effected, even at seven hours' notice if he had been bequeathed a fortune and the solicitors had apprised him of it, and forwarded a preliminary cheque by the post which had brought him no letter at all. When he had in fancy disbursed bank notes recklessly and experienced a keen disappointment at the calculation that his telegrams (if he could send them) would fail to secure the dainties from the Metropolis in time, he descended once more to the practical and considered how he could best lay out his nine shillings.

He took a walk, and patronized the confectioner to the extent of a "Dundee"—

an over-rated cake, adorned with sugar bullets, each of which is apt to startle the unwary consumer into the hideous impression that a tooth has dropped out—an airy creation in “sponge” and apricot jam, and a selection of biscuits beautiful with birds nests. He would have preferred *petits fours*, but *petits fours* are three shillings a pound, and delicacies only for the noble. He stipulated that the things should be sent to Lady’s Lane without delay, because it was now half-past ten and they would be required at five. After this, there remained to him four and sixpence, and he thought he would have some chrysanthemums and a dish of grapes. But the man who has sauntered through nursery gardens and spent no more than he intended has yet to be immortalized, and Allan gaily suggested the addition of that blossom and the other spray till grapes had

gone with *petits fours* to swell the catalogue of the impossible, and he made his exit rattling three-halfpence.

N'importe, fruit would have been a mistake, perhaps, and though he had forgotten the muffins the omission oppressed him not, since Mrs. Shaper should be told to get them in, and he would thus escape settling for them until her bill came up on Monday.

As he did not encounter Violet or Mrs. Carroll, he went back to his rooms, and smoked cigarettes complacently while he watched the bags arrive. Next he borrowed a pair of scissors, and arranged the flowers in the least objectionable of the "Present from Margate" mugs, which he stood on the mantelpiece in place of the memorial cards. To see a man arrange flowers is very funny, they seem specially born for women, like

nightingales and butterflies, and no male being was ever known to meddle with a butterfly after he left school, excepting, indeed, to run a pin through it.

Somehow, in surveying the result, Allan was displeased with his efforts ; there was a defect, although he could not determine what it was. Ah ! he had it : there were flowers in plenty, but—imbecile that he had been—not a vestige of green !

He collapsed helplessly, and contemplated his three halfpennies with a fixed stare ; he felt that he could scarcely demand credit from Mrs. Shaper for ferns. It is in crises that the financier is discernible, and Allan rose to the occasion. Again he trod the pavements of Chester—less majestically, but again. His destination was conspicuous by the sign which has been the epitaph alike of flannel petticoats

and diamond rings, and when he reached it he made a dive.

He left a silver lever in exchange for a ticket and five shillings—a small loan, which would bear small interest—and re-entered his lodging carrying a bundle of maiden-hair fern that might have sufficed for a medium-sized grotto. The mantel-piece was now a bower of beauty, and the improvement he had effected delighted him so much that he was still admiring it when “Mariar” came in with the steak, which she deposited on the sideboard to get cold while she went down in search of the potatoes and the bread.

From three to four he paced restlessly to and fro, the door and windows open lest the odour of those earlier cigarettes might be still offensive. When tobacco was indispensable, henceforward he smoked in

the bedroom. There was no clock in his apartments, a deficiency which necessitated frequent inquiries from the top of the kitchen steps; and he trusted devoutly Mrs. Carroll would evince no curiosity as to the progress of "the enemy," since the ticket in his pocket would not be useful as a reference. At a quarter to five he seated himself between the curtains, commanding a view of the street, and hated every strange woman who turned the corner. After he heard the hour chime in the distance, the eagerness of his attitude threatened impending suicide.

"The red rose cries 'She is near, she is near;'
And the white rose weeps, 'She is late'."

This was awful; ten, fifteen minutes past five and his guests were not visible. It was really not considerate of Violet; she affected to commiserate with him, but

was she taking much pains to make him happier when she could? She had undertaken to be punctual, and she must be perfectly aware of his sensations now. Those of Dean Swift, in the "Yacht Inn" of the same town, glaring at his banquet which no one had come to eat, were not dissimilar. It would be too dark to distinguish her when she did appear at the corner—perhaps he should say "if" she did! He would not willingly see faults in her: but *was* this kind? was it amiable? He . . . It was *not* too dark; could the blackness of Erebus have veiled that one dear figure from his gaze! They were crossing the road—*she* looked up at him and smiled! Of course, they must have been detained, and he had been inwardly reproaching her! Oh, the angel! what a brute he was!!

“I am so glad; I was afraid you had forgotten!”

“We are so sorry: there was a visitor at the last minute!”

And then he helped them off with their things, and “She” had a marten tail cape on; and the woman who is loved can never wear anything more bewitching in her sweetheart’s eyes than fur: it is so delicate and soft, and when he touches it, its warmth seems imbued with some of the magic of her personality.





CHAPTER VII.

“TAKE the arm-chair, Mrs. Carroll,” said Allan. “Miss Dyas, don’t sit there: I’ll wheel the couch closer. And you got rid of the visitor at last?”

“At last she went,” declared Violet; “I don’t think an earthquake could have ‘got rid’ of her. How dense she was! we were ready to leave when she was shown in, and as she said she was ‘afraid she’d called inopportunistly,’ and we only said ‘not at all,’ in a mutton-brothy manner, we didn’t imagine she’d stop long—but she did!”

“She was afraid to get up,” the widow explained; “I don’t suppose she has ever made a call by herself before; she is a very good girl.”

“Mr. Morris, she sat like this,” cried Violet, “‘the good girl’—just like this! And she twiddled her sunshade and stroked her muff all the time, and her ‘conversation’ was a series of questions and monosyllabic replies; she never ventured a remark once! And auntie inquired after her little niece, and asked her if she was fond of babies, and she said, ‘Y-e-s, rather . . . thanks,’ as if we were offering her one, and she glanced furtively at the cabinet to see if there were any inside.”

“And what did you do at length?”

“Oh, at length she observed she really *must* go, ‘Mother would be thinking she

was lost,' and departed, twiddling her sunshade to the end."

"Young girls always carry a sunshade when they pay visits," said Mrs. Carroll; "it is something for them to clutch at if they are nervous."

"What a caution to me!" exclaimed Violet. "I believe it was meant for one."

"My dear," averred her aunt, truthfully, "there are times when you seem to me every day as old as I am! Do you know I like your sitting-room, Mr. Morris; it doesn't realize your awful description a bit, and it might be very nice, indeed."

"Yes, the shape is all right, isn't it?" he answered—"a trifle stiff, but not bad; only it wants entirely refurnishing. If I bought everything it requires, it could be made to look very jolly; but then if I

could buy everything it requires, I should take a sitting-room somewhere else."

There was none of the restraint which the elder woman had vaguely dreaded; the host was resolved no allusion on his part, not even a smothered sigh, should temper the pleasure of the afternoon with embarrassment, and Violet had long since determined she would put every depressing thought aside.

Thus the moods of all three were in harmony, and had the pair been brother and sister, they could scarcely have chatted more frankly. They talked of music, of books, and of the theatres, of pieces produced and forgotten that they had mutually admired. Sometimes they fancied they made the discovery that they had been in the stalls of the same house on the same night, and said how funny that seemed

now. They talked as if their lives were indissolubly linked, and the severance which any week might bring was neither anticipated nor possible. And meanwhile Mrs. Shaper pottered about the table, till nothing remained to be done but to brighten it with a mug or two of the chrysanthemums, and really it presented a cheery aspect enough under the gaslight, with its shining cups and saucers (though they were thick), and the bowl of boiling water, keeping the muffins hot (though they were crumpets), and the feathery masses of green contrasting pleasantly with the bunches of pale pink bloom and the whiteness of the cloth (albeit, there was one big darn in the middle which none of the dishes hid).

“Will you pour out the tea, Mrs. Carroll?”

He noted, nevertheless, that the most fascinating of the "birds-nests" were absent, and felt, beneath the smile of hospitality, that he was indebted to the depredations of the idiot family.

So Violet and he sat opposite to one another, and Mrs. Carroll was ensconced behind the tray, and it struck the boy what rapture it would have meant could he have said: "Will *you* pour out the tea, Miss Dyas," and seen her darling little hand hovering over the sugar-basin, and adding the milk, for all the world as if she had been his wife. And presently when nobody would have any more, they resumed their places before the fire, and—well, there was never a face that looked so lovely in the firelight as Vi's, that was certain! And sometimes with that long big sofa all to herself, her chin would drop on the Valen-

ciennes collar, and her eyes grew softer yet and dreamier, while she saw pictures in the red-hot coals exactly as she might have done if she had been at home. "At home," oh, the dear, if this had been her home! If Mrs. Carroll had merely dropped in to spend an hour, and would be going directly, to leave him and Violet together! He would be her husband in that case, and she would be waiting now to beckon him to her side, and to draw his arm tightly about her waist, and by-and-by those full sweet lips would be lifted to him for a kiss, and with her curls nestling on his shoulder . . . "Yes, he trusted to have his book out by Christmas, and hoped Mrs. Carroll would accept a copy; he would have one specially bound for her!"

"I do wish it may be successful," she continued, "it would be such a splendid

thing for you ! Does your youth ever make you doubt yourself ? ”

“ Horribly ! ” he said ; “ but then look at ‘ A Nile Novel,’ they say George Fleming wrote it before she was twenty, and that’s clever enough, isn’t it ? it has the style of a man of the world. I was never more astonished than when I read somewhere that the writer was a woman. She does not tell you ‘ The spot was very beautiful,’ and describe it so, that you cry, ‘ What a capitally constructed paragraph ;’ the scene lies there in front of you, actually painted in printer’s ink ! ”

“ I should say,” Violet suggested, “ an author’s youth ought to be an encouraging remembrance rather than a depressing one, he has the more time to get on in ! ”

“ The longer future to anticipate, of

course," he agreed; "but, you see, we always want our happiness in the present!"

"And would not confidence in the future imply happiness in the present!"

"Patience, scarcely 'happiness,' I should fancy! And, besides, if he were already contented by the prospect of success, do you think he would labour as indefatigably to make the prospect a reality? I am not dogmatizing, I simply ask the question!"

"Does the man work better who is convinced he will achieve his ambition, or the man who has misgivings?" said Mrs. Carroll, "it resolves itself into that."

"The man who is convinced!" cried Violet.

"The man who doubts!" said Allan.

"No, I am sure I am right, Mr. Morris. The man who is convinced is impervious to disappointments; slights and sneers do not

sting him, his self-reliance is a kind of armour ! ”

“ It is the armour of egotism, and it weighs him down ! ” retorted Allan.

“ How ? ”

“ I must confess, Mr. Morris, the point of the remark is obscure to me too ! ” said her aunt.

“ I may be wrong, it is merely my idea ; egotism also, because *I* have misgivings, and therefore would like to prove them desirable for distinction ! But I should imagine the ambition of him who is quite certain it will be attained cannot be a very lofty one to begin with ; it may be money, but no one can be assured of fame ! ”

“ Ovid ! ” instanced Mrs. Carroll, classically.

“ Objection admitted,” he laughed ; then, with convenient ignorance : “ but

Ovid had to contend against less competition ! ”

“He has withstood all competition since ! ”

“He sang on a permanently attractive subject : he was the minstrel of Venus, and love is everlasting ! ”

“Doctor Johnson said,” observed the widow, hastening to avoid a discussion on the eternity of love, “that the possession of genius together with unconsciousness of the gift on the part of the possessor was not possible ! ”

“Doctor Johnson likewise opined that the fairest view on God’s earth was improved by a good hotel in the foreground ! ”

“Oh, oh, oh,” exclaimed Violet, “don’t quote Doctor Johnson, auntie ! ”

“Although,” added Allan, charitably, “I don’t suppose the poor man is really

responsible for half the idiotic utterances that are attributed to him! Anyhow, is the knowledge one has genius synonymous with the knowledge one will be great?"

"If coupled with the gift of perseverance, yes!"

"If coupled with the gift of opportunity, Mrs. Carroll!"

"‘Opportunity,’" she echoed, gently; "the man of mettle makes his opportunity!"

"Then he must have a double genius—the literary and the commercial!"

"It seems to me," said Violet, "we were not talking of genius at all, but of ‘success;’ are we not forgetting the warranted to wear quality of talent?"

"There was once a great lawyer," Mrs. Carroll began.

"‘Once upon a time,’ auntie."

"Yes, ‘once upon a time,’ it is nice and

vague, and I don't recollect who he was! But he wrote a work which filled up shelves, in the odd moments that his wife kept him waiting; ten minutes Monday night when she was not down to dinner, and a quarter of an hour on Tuesday when she was still at her *toilette* after the carriage had come round; and that book is one that everybody has heard of, like 'Coke on Lyttleton,' and and 'Helen's Babies,' . . . and this is *à propos* of opportunities!"

Allan flushed uneasily; to be reproved in the presence of the object of one's affections is as severe a test of one's *savoir faire* as may be conceived, and fortunately a test which seldom occurs, at any rate to heroes in fiction, who are always right, and therefore remain authoritatively calm to the end of the third volume. It is a matter never to be sufficiently regretted, that in

real life one cannot regulate one's acquaintance with the consideration shown to these heroes by the lady novelists who create them, and not only is one not always right, but it frequently happens there is somebody else on the scene—quite a minor personage bearing no relation to the plot—who knows better. There was a little pause during which Mrs. Carroll experienced the uncomfortable sensation of having evinced a shade less than her usual tact. It was broken by Violet.

“I should think,” she said, “there must have been one person who never admired that work much—the wife who was late for dinner. You may depend her industrious husband arranged copies of it to glare at her from the walls of every room she went into, and shortened her life. Nobody but a lawyer could have plotted such a diabolical revenge!”

“If you destroy the moral, my dear, I shall tell no more improving anecdotes.”

But though the argument terminated in a joke, Allan would sooner he had not been rescued from defeat by Miss Violet Dyas against what were avowedly her own convictions. It was distinctly amiable of her, but hardly the opening he would have chosen for her amiability to be displayed.

Then they talked twaddle, more unadulterated and absolute even than the controversy had evoked, but gay and purposeless twaddle withal, in which no one got the worst of it. And Allan confessed that the mantelpiece was customarily hideous with memorial cards, and that he had hidden them away, and when Mrs. Shaper cleared the *débris* of the feast Violet declared he

was trembling lest their disappearance should be noticed. Mrs. Carroll, too, vowed she felt heartless as they rose to say "Good-night," for who was to protect him from the householder's indignation when they were gone? "And see," the girl cried, "see how frightened he is in advance!"

It was all too quickly over. He walked to their own door with them, which protracted his enjoyment somewhat, but the leave-taking his insistence had postponed was made on the villa steps, and, strolling back alone, the distance from Powis Lodge to Lady's Lane was far longer than it had been from Lady's Lane to Powis Lodge. The furniture which greeted him grouped around his hearth wore a melancholy aspect now in its untenanted disorder, the cosiness of the semicircle had vanished. It seemed as much out of place as the carpet on which

we have valsed does hung out of the first-floor window at a sale. It was eloquent of Violet, certainly, as eloquent as he had been promising himself it would be, but with a depressing kind of eloquence for which he was not thankful.

He enlivened the hours that had to elapse before he could go to bed by meditating a novel to follow the one at which he was supposed to be at work, for he thought he would like to immortalize the situation of Violet and himself in print, but abandoned the idea at the remembrance that the love affairs of men of twenty-five are not deemed interesting in fiction, because the world declines to put faith in them in life. He said the world's scepticism was unjust, but it is natural. A young man's "eternal" fidelity of the spring is generally an amusing recollection by the autumn, that

is, if it ends well; if it does not end well, it becomes, in the majority of cases, the rock upon which his career is wrecked—the wedding bells are the prelude to the storm. Girls, on the contrary, frequently marry at the period of the debût, and make good, sensible, and affectionate wives, for they are not only more constant than men, they are far less apt to be mistaken in their feelings. A woman gives herself for love, or she sells herself for money, and the love or the money is there; but men dupe themselves every day into regarding their animal passions as the highest form of true devotion, and pay their whole lives for the gratification of a madness which fades in the satiety of the first six weeks. Phryne's frock sometimes seems in better taste than Penelope's; the paste occasionally looks finer than the gem; and this same animal passion

makes so brave a show and creates so surprising a ferment in the breast of him it masters that it needs experience to distinguish the spurious from the pure; and while all men are more liable to the mistake than women, the young man is most liable of all, since he has not as yet detected the plausibility of the sham sufficiently often to discriminate.

The objection applies to nine adolescent adorers out of ten; the tenth is the exception, and the exception is never believed in, whether it is a broken heart or a patent medicine. Indeed, there is nothing on this earth of ours flouted with such persistent incredulity as "the exception." It is the martyr that is sacrificed to prove the faith, the unheeded wolf which demolishes the shepherd boy, the grain of truth in the bushel of fact, which may be concealed, but

whose existence we refuse to recognize because it is not apparent to the cursory view. Allan was the exceptional tenth, nay, more, he was the exception in a thousand, for his love, besides being sincere, was well placed. A well-placed love at twenty-five years old, think of it! To discover, amidst the millions of women, the millions of possibilities for blunder, that one individuality which accords with the one God has given to you, and to have your own go out to it! Before your ideals are blunted, before the demands of the soul are moderated, to meet with her who satisfies them; and at twenty-five, when the greater part of life is still to be lived! Is it not wonderful, is it not bright and beautiful, this thing, if she loves you back again? My brothers, it is such a blessing as makes the poor man rich, and widens the narrow roadway up to Heaven. But if she does not

care for you in return, if you cannot win her, if your loneliness is augmented by the sight of the promised land you cannot reach—at twenty-five, when the greater part of life has still to be lived through!—the hopelessness of it then, the misery, the misfortune—aye, misfortune—for which you will get less sympathy than if you broke your leg! Knowing as he did the subject would be an unattractive one, the temptation to essay some exposition of his sufferings, to pour out and analyze some of this pain in print, still recurred to Allan, and would not be wholly put aside, for the attempt would be a relief, he felt, although it might not be a success. It even recurred to him the following morning while he sat manufacturing an uncongenial tale for the periodical, forcing himself to devise repartees for the “Hon. Honoria Majoribanks,” and envying

the mechanic and the cobbler, whose labours are independent of their moods.

He was in his accustomed place, his back to the stove and his face to the cheap side-board; outside the rain was blowing lightly against the windows. So a few months earlier he had sat in the sunshine when he wrote to his mother that thanksgiving for the meeting with his friend.

It was a wretched day, a dreary, drizzly day, which, to a man alone in lodgings, appears a week, and causes him to count the hours to bed-time as the only respite from depression it is reasonable to expect. Who can interest himself in the telling of a story of which each sentence is taking him ten minutes to invent? The author's gaze roved among the mugs and the dying flowers. He tried to imagine Violet and he were married, and she was sitting just out

of sight by the hearth watching him, and about to ask, "How are you getting on, dear?" What was that! He paused with his pen suspended above an uncompleted word, and listened intently and held his breath. It had been a ring at the front-door bell, a shrill peal that resounded through the house. It often jarred upon him, that bell, it made such a clang, yet this was probably the sixth time it had rung since breakfast, and the other five had not disturbed him; why did he notice it now? Who can say? There are no such things as presentiments we are told, but there he was alert on the instant, with lifted head, every sense quickened in the breathlessness of suspense, waiting as if immediately aware that it concerned him. Why did not somebody answer? What a delay there was! He got up, and looked out between the

red and the white curtain into the sloppy street. Oh, God! there was a cab drawn up beside the curb, and on the roof of the cab, with the rain running down it, there was luggage. For a moment his heart seemed to sink like lead, and then to beat so wildly that it must prevent him hearing whether the door was opened or not. He stood rooted to the spot, and argued with his own terror, and persuaded himself he had been for a second most ridiculously alarmed, and now was thoroughly composed again. He said next time he saw Violet he was going to tell her about this, and meant to make her laugh by an account of his unwarranted dread. Unwarranted? Oh! no, no, no. Heaven help him, it was not unwarranted, it was all too horribly true! One of the portmanteaux was imperfectly closed, and visible between the straps a bit

of colour caught his eye—it was a scrap of vivid chintz! It stamped the luggage directly, as if it had been her name upon it. He remembered how he had been with her when the stuff was bought, saw again in a flash the shop, the three high chairs, and Mrs. Carroll signalling to him the purpose it was to serve, and knew those unfamiliar boxes on the cab belonged to Violet, and that they meant that she was going away. There were voices in the passage, steps upon the stairs. He walked dizzily to meet them, and she and Mrs. Carroll were in the room.

“I have come to say ‘good-bye’!”

“You are going to London already?”

“Yes,” the girl responded in uneven tones, “there was a letter from my father when we went in last night; he has arrived, and wants me to join him at once.”

They made a group on the threshold; Violet had purple rings under her eyes, and the prevailing shade of the clothes she wore was grey, and she had been the first to speak. These things he recollected afterwards, quite distinctly.

“I am so sorry,” he said, “so terribly sorry! You will let me go to the station with you?”

“I think it will be better not,” answered Mrs. Carroll, “if you don’t mind?”

No, he did not mind; curiously enough he felt the refusal come rather as a relief although he had proffered the suggestion in all earnestness and sincerity. Anomalously also he felt it was unkind of her not to accept it, though he was glad she had declined.

It was like a brief nightmare, and then it was all over. He had turned the handle

of the cab upon them, and told the cabman where to drive. As the wheels went round, he had caught a glimpse of Violet in the further corner, through the misty glass, and now the vehicle was rattling along over the pebbled road. The rattle was a rumble, it would soon be out of sight. He stood desolate on the pavement, staring after it, as the noise grew less.

Presently, because he was trembling so, he drank some neat brandy at the bar of a neighbouring inn, and observing a tobacconist's, procured a cigar, fancying it would pull him together a bit. The first whiff disgusted him, and he threw it in the gutter. He re-entered the house, and shut himself in his bedroom. The sense of a great blank was upon him, as if all that was bright in his life had been suddenly torn away, leaving him nothing

except an empty future. He leant his forehead against the window-panes, and gazed up among the blackened chimney-pots of the opposite buildings, wondering if there were many people in the world so companionless and forlorn as he. Sobs shuddered through him, and shook him where he leant, though they were silent and tearless. Being as poor a bundle of nerves as any maiden in her teens, he, of course, created his heroes of cast-iron, and he was bitterly ashamed of himself, and felt, moreover, Violet would despise him for such womanishness if she were here to see. It was a hideous thought to come to a man at such a moment, that the girl he loved would despise him for the very abandonment of anguish she had caused, but when he strove to master his weakness he was startled to discover he was not

literally "giving way" at all, and that these convulsions were as uncontrollable by his will as the throes of any bodily illness. They continued until he was physically exhausted.

When he opened his eyes, the room was dark; how long he had slept he did not know: it must have been some hours. He groped his way into the sitting-room, to find that in darkness too. Shivering, he lit the gas, and looked about him; the fire was out; at the end of the table, by the dirty cruet, lay a cold chop stiffening in a layer of grease, which he knew was his neglected dinner. The absence of refinement, the cheerlessness, the apartment where Violet had uttered the "good bye" sent his loneliness home to him in one despairing rush, and now he did give way indeed. He struck at the wall with the

hysteria of a woman, and the force of a man, and clasping his head in his hands, flung himself face downward on the couch, where she had joked and teased him the afternoon before.





CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Robert Dyas married Miss Nellie Ebdon, he committed one of the few important actions of his life from which he was not likely to derive any pecuniary advantage. The younger daughter of a struggling country practitioner, he had met her at a dance in Notting Hill, where she had been chaperoned by the wife of another professional man equally obscure, and not even the jealousy of the little provincial town, where the doctor's two daughters were disliked, because they were better-looking than the heiresses of the

retired pork-butchers, who were his patients, was able to accuse the bridegroom of mercenary motives. This was unfortunate, since, when Bertha, the elder, had married, Spite immediately declared she had made a "dead set" at Mr. Carroll, and now Fathampton would have preferred some variety in its aspersions. He was undeniably well-off also, "enormously wealthy," rumour said, being a diamond merchant, a vocation that in those days had a semi-mysterious-Monte-Cristo-like ring about it, which a closer acquaintance with the habits and customs of Hatton Garden has removed. It was without doubt a most wonderful stroke of luck for the minx, the Fathampton mammas allowed grudgingly—with a glance at their own "unappropriated blessings," or a reminiscence of the latest cheque forwarded to

dear Georgina, whose husband had been a last resource—"so much higher, you know, than she could possibly have looked," and, truth to tell, Mr. Dyas had not been wholly unconscious of a kind of King Galahad nobility himself, when he proposed and was accepted by a girl whose "yes" meant a no more substantial acquisition than a deep and trustful love. As for his sisters, who worshipped him as blindly as—by some inexplicable law—only bad men with a pleasant manner are worshipped, his marriage was always cited by them as an incontrovertible instance of the generosity of "Bobbie's" disposition; and if to a stranger it may have seemed a somewhat remarkable illustration, in defence of the Misses Dyas' perspicacity let it be said they might have examined their brother's career for a long while without alighting

on any other. Their opinion to the contrary, however, the offer was neither magnanimity nor love, but a very excellent example of his natural tendency to self-indulgence, for while Mr. Dyas never missed an opportunity of making money without exertion, with impartial promptness he never denied himself a pleasure because it would involve the spending of it. He wanted Nellie, and he paid the essential price, as recklessly as he would have paid eighteen shillings out of his last sovereign for a supper, and took a wife as he would have ordered an *entrecôte*.

Three months after the ceremony he stumbled home in the small hours helplessly intoxicated; six months after it he was systematically false to her; and had he ultimately been compelled to expiate his "nobility" in the Divorce Court, the

disgusted girl would have had every excuse in the world for finally separating from him.

Nellie Dyas, though, was of the stuff of which faithful wives are made, and she was staunch to her broken idol to the end. Mrs. Carroll, perhaps, when she saw her, may have divined by her quieter tones, her paler cheeks, that the husband had not proved quite so heroic as the *fiancé* had been painted, but the disillusion was never avowed, and he did not throw the crockery at her to leave bruises. The bruise was in her heart, and in addition to her disenchantment she had money troubles, for the fortunes of men of Mr. Dyas's calibre are never represented by anything so prosaic as five per cent. securities, and the jewellery he had given her during the engagement was the veriest sop in the

pan of the difficulties which beset them before they had been wedded a year. The elegant furniture from Gillow's was mortgaged, and the tradesmen—that section of one's creditors who are the avenging angels of the whole lot—had to be interviewed and appeased when they were clamorous by the young wife, because, as Robert testily explained, a man's head does not stand for trifles, and “take his word for it, he had more important matters to consider.”

It was in consideration of them, probably, that he took to going out at night alone in dress clothes, and coming home dazed and insolent at dawn or even later, when the neighbourhood was astir and watchful. Once when he returned he woke her up to get half-a-crown to discharge the hansom, and she only had eighteen

pence, a dilemma which necessitated an application to the housemaid, who subsequently waited on them at the three p.m. breakfast, an impromptu repast he partook of very red about the eyes, and where Nellie sat opposite her lord upon the elegant furniture, assisting him to tea in a soda-water glass, and anchovies on toast, of which things the glass was the only one they did not owe for.

She learnt he could use very hideous language, too, when ruffled, this man with the pleasant manner, such language as she had heard from the mouths of excursionists when she had ventured abroad in Fathampton during the race week, though the full significance of two or three of his phrases was happily lost upon her. He cursed if the claret was "corked," and if the oysters were not "natives," while she, economizing

in her solitude, and rehearsing a merry smile of welcome for his entry, more often than not lunched off a bloater on the pretext that she was not hungry.

He was not always a beast, but he was improvident and thoroughly unprincipled. Now that as his wife she was told his schemes and speculations, she was appalled to discover that honesty and honour had no meaning to him at all. He regarded them as *terms* useful to the poet and dramatist, but having not the faintest relation to the affairs of daily life. He would not have felt in the least insulted at being called a rogue, but it would have offended him extremely to have called him a clumsy one. On the subject of a smart swindle that had lately come to his ears he would wax eloquent, amiable, and even sprightly, displaying again that *bonhomie*

which commended him to chance acquaintances and had fascinated herself so in the period of their courtship. After a harrowing account of a new worry, also, a stranger who had just dropped in would have deemed him an ideal husband, mated to a melancholy and uncongenial woman, for as his recital finished, the woe was no longer his own, but his confidante's. He put it totally aside, suggested drinks, and was cheerful, like Harold Skimpole; only the wife who had to listen and contrive was depressed, calculating, while the ex-martyr discoursed with gay philosophy, on how much she could scrape together or what she could pawn.

When he was left a widower, and his child, just eight, had been disposed of to her Aunt Bertha, Mr. Dyas went to the Cape. He did badly, bethought himself of

his family, to whom his attentions when in England had been as rare as angels' visits—though less unmercenary—and returned, a veritable prodigal son. After partaking of several fatted calves, he sighed and was downcast. Solicitously questioned by the long-suffering sisters, Sophie and Emilia, whose faith years had not impaired, he told them wearily the inducement for such a man as he to go to the States just now was simply marvellous, and that if he had possessed even a hundred pounds he could have turned it into a fabulous amount in a twelvemonth. The particular branch of industry to which he yearned to devote his intellect did not transpire, but the general tenor of his communication was to the effect that the American continent was waiting for him. He had *not* the desirable hundred, and—

here he sighed more heavily than ever, and paced the floor, struggling with despair. By the time he had completed his third stampede from the flower-stand to the dinner-waggon, Sophie and Emilia were reduced to the verge of tears, and everybody felt that "something must be done." "Something," nevertheless, was vague, wherefore did Mr. Dyas's distraction endure for many days, and seek resource in much Martell and little seltzer, a beverage his sisters hastened to pour out for him (tumbling over each other in the rush of rivalry), and which his mother and father began to regard as an expensive panacea.

They discussed the affair solemnly and sadly in their joint bedroom, the Misses Dyas, weeping to think of Bobbie's commercial brilliance being allowed to waste

in Westbourne Park, and exhorting one another between their sobs to simulate extra liveliness downstairs that the "poor boy" (he was then four-and-forty) might be saved from brooding more than was compatible with his health. These *conseils en deshabille* continued long after parents and daughters had dispersed to their respective apartments, and while two middle-aged women sat in their dressing-gowns meditating ways and means, or alternately disturbing each other's rest by a luminous inspiration that was not practicable, the object of their anxiety would be stretched across two chairs in the dining-room, serenely perusing a "Princess's Novelette."

It may seem an anomaly that he could still retain the trust of two hard-headed, sensible sisters, when he had so speedily

shattered the belief of an inexperienced girl; but it is explicable thus: firstly, in the bosom of his family Mr. Dyas was wise enough to comport himself a great deal more decently than he had done in the presence of his wife; secondly, when he had married he was thirty-three, and now, at forty-four, it took a great deal more to make him drunk. A fact, of which the explanation is wonderful, indeed, is that he was rather popular than the reverse in the circle where they moved. Socially, when sober, he could render himself distinctly agreeable, but that alone does not account for it; his unscrupulousness merely tended to flavour his casual conversation with a tinge of cynicism which people found rather piquant and refreshing, but this again would have been insufficient to counteract the influence of a preceding reputation, which

was, to say the least, not unsullied. No ; the wonderful explanation comes in here : In his early manhood a beneficent fairy, still as exquisite as in the days when Hans Andersen chronicled her triumphs and immortalized the nobility of her actions, appeared to Mr. Dyas,—her diadem, three stars gleaming in the background of a blue label, and delivered herself to the following effect. She said :

“You are bad, core through ; you are selfish, deceitful, a gambler, and a thief ! I have no wish to be impolite, but your disposition is a treacherous one, wherefore, up to the age of thirty-five, perhaps, you will betray the honest and the friendly to benefit your pocket ; from thirty-five up to the age when the earth shall be happily rid of you, you will betray them without any motive at all, merely because you are a wretched

creature, and by that period, it is pretty safe to conjecture, will have drunk away half your brains. Much of this you have not discovered yet, you will perceive it as you get older! Now, I propose to endow you with a couple of gifts; I cannot make you good, it is beyond my power." This statement the fairy uttered without diffidence, as one of us might say, "I am not strong enough to shift the Albert Memorial,"—"but I will present you with any two attributes you decide to name. If you select judiciously, they will very likely blind the world to your real character, and convey an altogether mistaken impression about you: they shall, in a word, be your 'top strawberries'—choose!"

He chose Tact and Sentiment; the tact, which he owned in a degree surprising in masculine nature, henceforward preventing

his saying anything in cool blood to a person's face calculated to wound or anger, and hinting always the possibility for gratifying a monkey-like malice by the infinitely safer expedient of saying it to somebody else ; and a thick veneer of sentiment—albeit, it never deterred him from committing a blackguardism when a blackguardism was adapted to advance his interest — yet attracting women and very young men to repose their secrets in him until they found him out. This, with many apologies for prolixity, is the true and authentic history of how Mr. Robert Dyas attained his popularity. N.B. The fairy's motive for her singular course of procedure has never been ascertained.

As soon as he observed his distress had been adopted, Mr. Dyas publicly recovered ; the concern was now his sisters', and he was cheerful and bland. He told them funny

stories, and rallied them playfully on their abstraction, prophesying "good times yet." He insisted on having up the solitary bottle of champagne out of the cellar one evening, to raise their drooping spirits; and then, said Sophie and Emilia, in the ensuing petticoat parley, "How considerate Bobbie was, how nice about a house;" the pair being as touched by this burst of "liberality" as if he had paid for it.

By degrees the "something" assumed definite proportions, and he prepared to depart. The family was not in affluent circumstances, but the matter had been managed, and, to give him his due, he was not ungrateful for their tenderness either. He kissed them affectionately, really moved, and it hurt him to know a five-pound note of Emilia's had been a portion of the sacrifice. He declared, and he meant it, he would make

them a recompense one day which should be worthy of their unvarying goodness to him, only—it was characteristic—it never occurred to him the five-pound note might be declined, and an instalment of the recompense made at once if he were willing to suffer the personal inconvenience of travelling to New York a second-class passenger instead of a first.

It was literally because such abatements of his dignity never did occur to Mr. Dyas that they never occurred to the spinsters; he had, as it were, educated them up to regarding him from his own standpoint. He could have loafed at home for years, waiting for a large business to offer itself to a shady adventurer without any capital, before it would have entered the mind of either of them that he might have replied to an advertisement for a city clerk. They would have

shrieked derision at the idea. A pound or thirty shillings a week to Bobbie? Why, he was a merchant! So merchants with neither merchandise nor the means of getting any, not being in requisition, he had lived upon his relatives, and now was quitting the parental ark the object of as many hopes and prayers as the Scriptural dove—to come back to it, they were certain, bearing the verdant spray which should signify to them a land of prosperity and two hundred per annum houses.

He remained in the United States seeking something green for a period of eight years, and Emilia remained five pounds to the bad. He was mostly unlucky, always extravagant, and generally drunk; but in his intervals of sobriety contrived, under the promise of marriage, to ruin a silly girl in New York whose father had befriended him, and one fine morning, when the eighth year was

drawing to a close and discovery was imminent, took a cab to Pier 40, and sailed for England without remembering to wish her good-bye.

He had changed his last quarter, and been for a spell reduced to beer which he took at a different bar each day, because he ate so ravenously of that institution of the American bars, the free lunch, that he was ashamed to patronize the same establishment twice, when chance had thrown this ignorant storekeeper across his path to restore him to cocktails and credit once more. The man's pity had actually rescued him from destitution, and the girl was the apple of the old man's eye. But they were left without a pang, only the genial assurance that he would be "round as usual in the evening," though he knew that in the evening he would be at sea.

"I must confess . . . oh, my dear, you

know I shall have to confess !” the terrified girl had whispered, clinging to him for an instant in the passage.

“ Yes, little woman, I know,” he replied, soothingly, and he patted her on the arm as he spoke, “ don’t be frightened, I’ll talk to your father to-night as soon as I come in, and make it all right. I shan’t be late !”

And he was not. His luggage had been sent on the afternoon before, and he caught the boat nicely. It was an occasion where Bobbie’s sentiment was subordinate to Bobbie’s advantage.

He was held “ charming ” on board by the women—he brought them a rug on deck instead of asking them if they wanted one—and arriving at Liverpool, won golden opinions at an hotel dinner, from a mamma whose six-year-old daughter, separated from her by two or three seats, had been casting

ardent glances at a dish of biscuits without having the courage to request it should be passed. Mr. Dyas smiling at her shyness, rose from his chair, regardless of the stares the act provoked, and procuring the dish, emptied about a third of its contents before a delighted gaze. "That young lady had to ask for the biscuits three times," he said calmly to the scowling waiter; "you should attend to your duties better!"

"Did you not like the strange gentleman to-night, Maudie?" questioned the mother, as her pet was undressed.

"Yes! and oh, mamma, he gave me such a lot, did you see?"

"He was very kind to you, dear, very thoughtful; add a prayer for the good gentleman who took notice of a tiny mite."

"Dod bless the dood gentleman who took notice of a tiny mite!" lisped the child.

And at the same moment, over there in New York, a father was crying for eternal vengeance on the villain who had betrayed his daughter.

Things in eight years have an unpleasant knack of changing, and Mr. Dyas found they had not stood still in Virginia Square, Westbourne Park. Everybody was eight years older, to commence with. The two spinsters—Emilia very tall, and Sophie very squat, like feminine editions of Robert Macaire and Jacques Strop—were less active, though they rejoiced over him on the doorstep as if the rook had been a dove, indeed. His mother had grown much shakier, and his father was even more of a nonentity than formerly, which was saying a good deal; of course, in the far distant past it was he who had earned the income which supported the household now, but Dyas *père*

did not count for all that. "Father" kept the family, and "mother" kept the purse.

That which affected Robert most deeply was not the diminution in the spinsters' sprightliness, however, nor the consciousness that, regarded as a dove, he must be pronounced a failure. He was chiefly concerned by a newly developed and very apparent parsimony on the part of his mother, and the intelligence that the investment in which their capital was sunk was paying poor dividends, the strictest economy being consequently the order of the day. That they were not so easily situated as when he had lived upon them last, he had been made aware by letters, and had accordingly paved the way for a certain step, if it should prove unavoidable, by that carefully-considered composition to Chester, but he had fervently trusted to hit on some alternative, and had

not understood the hinted economy in the sordid sense in which it was presented to him. It was only when Mrs. Dyas began to lock up the brandy bottle when she went to bed, and to put the key in her pocket, that he grasped economy's full significance, and saw that if he proposed to resume anything of his earlier position in the *ménage*, the companionship of a daughter to whom his father-in-law had bequeathed four thousand pounds, would be the one method of doing it.

He calculated silently, and perceived that between what the extra mouth would actually cost and the sum he could pay for it, his maternal parent would put away an ample profit, since the tradesmen's books which he had surreptitiously perused, showed the rate at which the family was subsisting to average about ten shillings a week each, and out of the hundred and twenty per annum of

which he would get command, he could pretend to estimate the expense of the girl's maintenance at a sovereign, thus leaving a tolerable margin for outside expenditure for himself and an occasional dress for her, besides gaining importance by the assistance her advent would imply. In the meantime, Mrs. Dyas was making nasty observations when he demanded a second drink in the course of the evening, and indignation meetings had taken the place of the old time *conseils en deshabille*. Sophie and Emilia vowed it was disgraceful "the boy should be begrudged" before he had been home a week; and he confidentially declared that, but for "the girls" the house would be unbearable. They still preserved the habit of speaking of each other and themselves, as if they were all "sweet seventeen."

"You want a suit of clothes, Robert!"

said Sophie in one of these conferences ;
“ doesn’t he, Emilia ? ”

“ He wants a suit of clothes badly ! ”
said the tall Emilia, ponderously ; she had a
bass voice that rumbled like thunder, and
caused people to jump when they were
introduced.

“ Very well, then, if he wants a suit of
clothes, he must have it ! ” rapped out
Sophie, whose delivery was, on the contrary,
shrill and rapid, the ends of her spoken
words being like those in the writing of a
literary man—generally to be guessed at.
“ Have you got any money, Bobbie ? ”

“ I’ve got about five pounds,” he said.

He had, in point of fact, five ten dollar
bills, having won a little at euchre on the
voyage, but he always told a lie on principle.

“ You can’t do much with that ? ”

“ I must go to a cheap tailor, and get a

hat for half-a-skiv somewhere. I daresay I can manage!" he said, wearily.

"Isn't it awful?" growled Emilia, "isn't it horrible?"

"What he has come to!" moaned Sophie; "our Bobbie in cheap clothes!"

So they sold a flimsy relic of a fifteen carat chain which had been lying for years in their wardrobe, and while the proceeds lasted, slipped two-shilling pieces into his overcoat on the sly, that his feelings might be spared the pain of direct acceptance. For a few days he discovered one each time he went out, and resorted to a bar in the vicinity where Hebe said what a liberal gent he was.

The domestic storm which brought discontent to a crisis broke some nights later, and was born of the debated suit itself. When the package was delivered, the ser-

vant took it into the dining-room where they all sat after dinner, and uttered five ominous words :

“A parcel for Mr. Robert !”

There was a temporary hope that Mrs. Dyas was asleep, but it was doomed to disappointment. She had only been cogitating, and slowly disclosed her eyes with exasperating vigilance.

“A parcel !” she echoed. “What is it ?”

“It’s all right, mother,” he said, ingratiatingly. “Get the bill receipted, Susan, that’s all !”

“Four pounds ten !” muttered Mrs. Dyas, forsaking her chair, and peering at the coins through her spectacles. “Four pounds ten ! What’s four pounds ten ?”

“Ninety shillings,” retorted Sophie,

sharply. "Go on, Bobbie, take it upstairs."

"What d'ye mean?" exclaimed the old woman, now prodding the brown paper viciously. "What's inside—what's it for—whose money is it he's throwing about like that?"

"It's his own money," said Emilia, dwelling on each syllable with the exaggerated enucleation of annoyance: "it has procured a coat, a waistcoat, and a pair of trowsers, and they were ordered because he was not in a fit condition to go outside the door!"

"Don't talk to me like that, you long fool!" exclaimed her mother, in a rage. "Don't croak at me, you raven! Not in a fit condition? What am I, with my rags tumbling off me, denying myself to keep a roof over your heads? Let him go

and better his condition . . . four pounds ten ! ”

There was a gasp from the sisters, and then—

“I think, mother,” said Robert, with the air of a man who has solved a problem, “that I am one too many here ! Good night ! ”

He walked from the apartment, bestowing a comprehensive bow, and Emilia followed, carrying the parcel, which he had instinctively felt would detract from the stateliness of his exit. The little servant had had scarcely time to vanish from the mat.

Smoking cigarettes at the foot of his sisters’ bed till two a.m., he casually mooted the scheme for Violet’s coming to them, and had his mental arithmetic confirmed.

“If I paid a quid a week for her,

mother would feather her nest, wouldn't she?" he inquired.

"Just half that is what each person's food amounts to," answered Sophie—"just half, I know. I should say she would jump at the proposal, though, of course, you can make up your mind that she'll swear she loses by it. I call it a brilliant idea for everybody! I'm sure you'd better have the benefit of Dr. Ebdon's money than that widow in Chester."

"It was well enough," added Emilia, "when the girl had to go to school, and that sort of thing; but now . . . what expense is the girl now? And I daresay she'll bring plenty of frocks with her, the widow is certain to get her a lot of new ones to show she didn't stint her, and she must make them last!"

"Well, I shan't hurry down to-

morrow; one of you broach the subject first," he suggested, "and if mother doesn't say anything about it when she sees me, I'll pack up—ostentatiously!"

But Mrs. Dyas did say something about it. She was alone when he descended, and opened negotiations by asking him if he would like "The Telegraph," after which amenity Violet's instalment was settled while he ate an egg, quite affably, neither making any allusion to the disturbance of the night before.

"I am the last woman," she murmured, with a display of pocket-handkerchief, "to stand between a father and his child. Such as my means allow I do; there is a pie for dinner to-day! A pound a week will be something towards her keep, at all events; and when Sophie hinted you wanted your

daughter with you my heart forbade me to consider the expense."

"You're very good, mother," he rejoined. "I'll drop a line to Bertha Carroll as soon as I've finished breakfast. Perhaps it will be best to write as though I had only just arrived; I don't think I need go down there. I can say somebody's too ill for me to leave, and I shall tell her to let the girl start at once."

This was on the Wednesday which had also witnessed Allan's tea-party, and the evening following Susan was despatched to the station to meet the traveller whose departure from Chester had been announced by telegram. She might shortly be expected back. Sophie and Emilia were knitting stockings beside the fire, Mrs. Dyas meditated upon the sofa, and Robert himself stood between the spinsters on the

hearthrug, carefully dressed in his new suit. He bore his age well; there was very little grey in his hair, though the brown was getting wofully thin, and a slightness of build, coupled with an upright carriage, lent him the appearance of one greatly his junior until he turned his haggard face. It was not an ill-featured countenance, nevertheless, but it was bloodless-looking, and, in the manner of the traditional villain's, the shifty blue eyes seldom fairly met your gaze. It demanded no keen examination to conceive that this man could once have looked a gentleman, only no gentleman would ever have mistaken him for one to-day. At fifty-two one's face is the register of one's career, and Mr. Dyas's—to men, at least—proclaimed him rascal. His sisters were addicted to blaming that big drooping

moustache of his to account for the cynical expression "the boy" always had, "like one of Ouida's guardsmen, exactly;" but, again, the Misses Dyas were at fault, for the drooping moustache was an advantage, since it hid a bad mouth.

He lit a cigarette, somewhat nervously, and as he did so the drift of Mrs. Dyas's reflections was made clear. She said querulously—

"Of course, there is 'washing' to be thought about, the 'washing' mustn't be forgotten. It's all very well, but I can't afford to include another laundry-bill in a pound a week!"

"Oh, mother!" ejaculated Emilia, glancing up from the heel, "when everything's arranged!"

"I know I did not mention it yesterday," admitted her parent. "I wasn't

given time to collect myself, you all rushed me so. I am entitled to require twenty-three shillings, Bobbie!"

"Oh, dear, no," said her son, decisively; "there are clothes to be bought with the balance. I can't go above the pound!"

"And I don't see where the 'rushing' came in," interposed Sophie. "I'm sure we talked about the matter enough before you settled it with Bobbie; it's ridic'lous to want more now!"

"I am an old woman," said Mrs. Dyas, "pinching to keep a roof over your heads" — they had been anticipating a reference to the roof, and the spinsters sneered — "an old woman, Bobbie, and, upon my word, it's as much as I can do."

"I can't manage more than a sovereign, mother."

"If you saw my books every week you'd be astonished!"

"Yes, I daresay I should!" he responded.

"It isn't fair on me," she continued, her voice rising to a squeak; "I am not going to be imposed upon! There are Sophie and Emilia, who couldn't get married, and have to be supported all their lives; then you coming here when you're broke; and now a granddaughter invited to eat me out of house and home! Do you think I'm made of money, the lot of you?"

"A father and his child!" he reminded her with a sneer.

"We were idiots," rattled Sophie, whilst Emilia jumped up with ashen cheeks. "If we'd married crossing-sweepers it would have been better than stopping with you!"

What do you want? Won't you save enough out of the girl already? You ought to be thankful she is coming!"

"A fine father," said Mrs. Dyas, ignoring this thrust, "a fine father, who never so much as recollected his child till it suited his convenience. Don't you try to humbug me, Mr. Robert."

"And don't you try to humbug me," he cried, passionately, "because you're wasting your time. A pound a week! Do you suppose I'm such an ass as to imagine she'll cost you a pound a week? Do you suppose you take me in by your rot? You scrape and hoard, and watch every mouthful we eat, and agreed to her coming because a quid 'll pay for her food and mine as well! I'm sick of your manœuvres, that a baby could see through, sick of your miserly house, and if I'd got any business you

wouldn't be troubled with either one of us, believe *me* !”

“I never was. You come here for what you can get !” she almost yelled.

“And *dam* little it is !”

“Hush ! for Heaven's sake be quiet,” exclaimed Emilia, “there's the bell.”

The women dropped into their seats breathless and trembling ; Robert attempted to simulate something of paternal eagerness against the mantelpiece ; nobody felt equal to going out into the hall.

There was a brief pause ; then the cook opened the door, and, pulling himself together, Mr. Dyas went forward with outstretched hand as Violet entered the room.

END OF VOL. I.





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